

# THE MARK OF THE BEAST

REGINALD  
..WRIGHT..  
KAUFFMAN









**THE MARK OF THE BEAST**



**DEACCESSIONED**



"LET ME—LET ME GO!" GASPED FLORIDA

# THE MARK OF THE BEAST

*A NOVEL*

BY

REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN

AUTHOR OF

"THE HOUSE OF BONDAGE," "JIM," ETC.

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TO  
THREE GOOD FRIENDS:  
EDWARD COOK,  
WILLIAM MORROW  
AND  
FRANK H. SIMONDS,  
WHO MAY DEBIT THE DEED,  
BUT WHO WILL, I TRUST,  
CREDIT THE INTENTION.

R. W. K.

*“So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.”*

—THE BOOK OF NUMBERS: XXXV: 33.

## PREFACE

Even at a brief distance of less than two weeks from the completion of "The Mark of the Beast," it has become clear that a certain disclaimer is necessary. This I hasten to make: In the story between these covers there is no propaganda; there is no sermon. I have no axe, obvious or concealed, to grind.

That statement may as well bear elaboration. Some of my recent critics have complained that my habit is to seduce readers with the pretense of a novel, only, half-way through, to hand them a tract; and these critics are even more angry with the public for buying and liking than with me for planning and writing. In my own partial escape from wrath I confess a satisfaction entirely human; I had rather my readers endured than myself, for I am one and they are many; but in protest against such blows as have been spared them and given me I now frankly—run away. I say that they declare, these reviewers, and with some justice, that I have stood at the entrance to my little sideshow, gathering the people with promises of exhibiting the fat-lady, whereas, once I have got my audience into the tent, I devote my entire energy, such as it is, to selling my dupes

a patent medicine for the reduction of superfluous flesh. Something, I think, might be put forward for the methods thus ascribed to me—if the medicine could be proved efficacious. Nevertheless, in the present instance I am compelled by the facts to say at once that I have no medicine of any sort for sale.

Eleven days ago, when I had just completed "The Mark of the Beast," I thought this obvious. Now a friendly critic has read the manuscript and wrecks that hope. That the critic is friendly inheres in the reading, for the reading of any manuscript is a test of friendship that I, for one, have evaded with such few exceptions as a wonderful evening when John Masefield sent me the first draft of "The Everlasting Mercy." However, my present friend describes my story as "a study of the Negro Problem." It is nothing of the sort.

Lamentable as that friend may think it, I wanted only to tell a story. In the telling I have expressed no opinions on the "Negro Problem"—or on any other. Cal Ridgeley dislikes the negroes; Colonel Tréville and his ilk like them, but consider the black race inferior to the white; Sanborn has in him something of the extreme radical-Abolitionist tradition; Jane wavers between the influences of early environment and those of later travel. Ridgeleys exist in the North as well as in the South (witness Coatesville, Penna.), but so do Trévilles, Sanborns and Janes. What, therefore, solely intrigued me was the



endeavor to make each character speak and do according to his own point of view and thereby create the plot, the action.

Perhaps I should explain further. The story that I wanted to tell was one in which the drama would principally hinge upon the contrast between two types of Americans and two periods of our national development: so I took a New Englander into the South. In order to lend this contrast its necessary value, somebody whose traditions were totally opposed to those of my New Englander had to be placed in the New Englander's way: considering Mark as he must be, such an obstruction to his course would best be furnished by the creation of a "fire-eater"; I was dealing with the present time, and the tradition of the fire-eater, once common to all America, has survived longer in the South than in the North; it was thus obvious that my fire-eater in the South ought to be Southern-born. Given such a man in such surroundings, the negro element of the story follows inevitably.

Even so it may be objected that I could, for my purpose, as well have sent a Southerner into New England. For some other purpose I might indeed do this, and I should very much like to try; but here was essentially a story of annoying invasion; to account for his passion for reshaping the universe, my invader had to be a practical man, in more senses than one a builder, because it is only your

practical man, and never the dreamer, who both expects and attempts Utopia. Now, although New Englanders do sometimes build railways in the South, Southerners don't go to New England to build railways: they are, for the most part, quite sensibly contented with that State of the Union in which it has pleased God to call them to birth.

Taking full account of this condition that—one might almost say—forced upon me a Southern setting, I did my best to avoid reproducing, as that setting, any especial portion of the South. I do not mean that I attempted anything so difficult, not to say absurd, as a composite picture; I attempted to draw upon only sufficient atmosphere: it was my task to secure a synthesis between the illusion of reality and the fact of localization.

Take the action in so far as it concerns Jackson or Turner: it could happen in any Southern State. It has happened in more than one Northern commonwealth.

In the case of the landscape, I have been sufficiently general to make the story possible to any of a number of places along the sea. The scene might well be any portion of the Atlantic coast from North Carolina to Florida.

Take again the Southern characters. I have already explained their points of view; but take their dialect. Dialect varies in our Southern States: I have merely indicated that my people do use a dia-

lect, but, having no particular State or district in mind, I have not tried to transcribe any particular dialect—have tried, indeed, to avoid so doing.

Repeating, then: my opinions do not, here, enter. Whatever I want in “The Mark of the Beast” I do not want to convert anybody to anything; I do not even want to save anybody’s soul. Kant’s “things-in-themselves” are, for my part, not more illusive than is a controversial reality in this story.

REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN.

“The Little House on the Hill,”  
West Point Road, near Ashdale, Maine;  
30th May, 1916.



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## CHAPTER I

HIS FATHER'S SON

“Old and new make up the warp and woof of every moment. There is no thread that is not a twist of these two strands.”

—EMERSON: “Quotation and Originality.”

I

THE large room was an anachronism; the little man in the midst of it horologically correct.

The four walls, straining to the distant ceiling under a cloak of faded gray paper in which still twinkled a few of the bits of gilt that had once been a constellation of decorative stars; the narrow, white surbases; the thin-pillared, delicately arched doorway; the deep fireplace aglow with useful brass and wholly unnecessary logs—all these things pertained of right to a time that had long since passed and a society that, dramatically, should long since have followed it. They belonged to the period of the claw-footed bookcase on one side and the spindle-legged table on the other; to the period of the severe sconces that reached out from the walls, of the big mahogany desk that stood in the center of the old bow-window. They had been, in a word, the property of the pale ladies in point-lace and brocade, of the rigid gentlemen in buff and blue continentals, or ancient frock-coats and painful stocks, who now, with waning faces in blackening backgrounds, out of their tarnished frames—the Tré-

ville family portraits—looked down at the interloper that had strayed among them.

The interloper was a brief, stocky man of twenty-five years and complete maturity. That he was dressed in a suit of shepherd's plaid declared his courage; to his determination the powerful jaw of his clean-shaven face gave ample testimony, and if his quick blue eyes were so sharp as sometimes to be startling, his mop of intractable red hair and his facile grin were indubitably born of a spirit that was amiable.

"Like the place?" he said—repeating a question that had just been put him—"I think the whole house must smell of cedar-chests and lavender."

He was addressing a girl whose supple back, though not ungraciously, was turned from him: a back too easily straight, supporting a head too superbly placed upon its strong shoulders, to be ungracious even to an interloper.

Without turning, the girl, whose eyes were on the garden that stretched green beyond the open bow-window, answered him.

"I dare say it does," she said. "Of course, I've never lived anywhere else, scarcely, and so I don't notice it; but you're right, Mr. Sanborn; its own time is daid, it's shut its door on the present, and now here it is, mummifying here in its own atmosphere."

Her voice was a tender, low contralto; her accent

not the barbarous twang of the illiterate southerner, but the liquid accent of the cultivated south.

Mark Sanborn's parched New Hampshire ears drank of it greedily. He cast a deprecating glance about him—on all sides the tokens of a departed splendor.

"You people are too hard on yourselves," he protested. "You always do things well—even what you are pleased to call mummifying."

Still the girl did not turn to him. Had the New Englander been less of a business-man and more of a poet, he might have thought that her gaze was repeopling that garden with the men and women of her family's past.

"Think of it," she was saying: "we still dine at three o'clock in the afternoon. And clothes? Well, we do our duty to religion by putting on our tightest stays for Sunday. Don't make out you don't notice it, sir! In town especially—the cobbled alleys that we-all used to call streets with the walls of buildings that are just the withered corpses of a daid commerce!"

"I declare to you," lied Sanborn, "that the only houses I notice over there are the dwelling-houses with their side-entrances that bring you into a court and leave you with the house-door still to pass. That's like a foreign country."

The straight shoulders shrugged as he looked at them.



"It's all the foreign country we-all ever see," she answered. "Your northern girls go to Europe before they're out."

"Yes, they go abroad for their titles, but they always come home for their divorces. There's never any strike in our divorce-factory. Down here you still believe in marriage, don't you?"

"We do."—Her tone was deprecating, but it now bore, in spite of the words that also freighted it, a note of courteous superiority. "I reckon it's a survival of savage superstition, but we still believe in marriage. We believe in it so much that, in some of our States, our laws don't permit an end of it on any ground whatever."

Sanborn coughed. "Well," he smiled, "that doesn't frighten me. It partly was about a marriage that I came here to ask your advice, Miss Tréville."

Florida Tréville turned. Beauty always thinks well of itself, and, as often as not, beauty is the effect of this rather than the cause. In any case, Florida carried herself with the air of a beauty—and was beautiful. Plentiful chestnut hair, which the sunlight brushed with gilt, was massed over her broad forehead and placid, level brows. Her features were of that delicate, sensitive sort which seems to have been modeled only by a sculptor that loves his work—features that, though for no real reason, the popular mind associates solely with generations of the protected leisure which most often

produces gentility. Her skin was satin-white with the faintest tinge of pink—you felt that it must have the faint odor of an old-fashioned rose—her eyes were large brown pools shot with ripples of flame, and her mouth was the mouth of a child.

“About a marriage, Mr. Sanborn?” she echoed. “Not about my own, I trust, sir.”

Mark flushed before her provoking smile.

“I didn’t know you had one in mind,” he told her.

“That’s it; I didn’t; but you see here in the South”—she still smiled—“that statement of yours sounds uncommon like the preface to what we still call a ‘declaration.’ ”

Only then did he see that she did not mean it.

“Oh,” he said, “I knew very well that I had no chance with you——”

“So you’ve come to ask me if I thought you might have one with Jane MacDonald?”

Mark’s flush deepened: as is the way with most practical men, he was soonest routed by the practical.

“How did you guess it?” he demanded.

“Because,” said Florida, with the slightest possible toss of her head, “I’m not quite blind, sir. But it’s no use,” she added. “You can’t have her, Mr. Sanborn.”

“Why not?” He was bold enough now: denial always made him bold. “She’s no child——”

“She’s just my age.”

"Of course, of course; but she's been a widow for three years——"

"And there is your trouble, Mr. Sanborn—or a part of it; she is the widow of one of our own people and the orphan daughter of another."

"You mean—oh, but that's impossible!"—He shook the annoyance from him: "Southern girls are marrying northern men every day."

"Not our sort of southern girls——"

He bit his lip. "To my sort of northern men?" Half in query, he finished her uncompleted thought. "I see. You mistrust us."

"Not that!"

But he had to face it at last, though he was so soon to disregard it.

"Yes, you do; you can't help it; we're so different. It's not your fault; it's not ours. You've lived here for generations. You've come to regard this part of the world as exclusively your own, because a king that never saw it gave it to one of your ancestors that never paid for it.—I mean that kindly, but what I mean is the truth. Why shouldn't you feel that way? For two hundred years your people were so thoroughly the rulers of these acres that you had the power of life and death over four-fifths of the human beings that lived on them. And now——"

He hesitated, but her brow was unruffled. She nodded for him to go on.

"And now," he said, "a railroad comes along

and gets the right of eminent domain through a part of your land, and I'm sent here by the road to hire labor and build this section of our thoroughfare. Of course you can't realize that I'm as much the slave of this road as ever one of your grandfather's black men was the slave of his master: you regard me as a responsible portion of the power that has taken something of your own away from you."

The girl put out a soothing hand—a hand very white and fine.

"I didn't mean just that," she said—"but perhaps that's the truth, too. And anyhow," she more brightly added, "I hope you soon will be a responsible portion of the St. Augustine and Richmond road, Mr. Sanborn, for I'm sure you deserve to be one of its biggest officers. You see, we're not so much your personal enemies as not to want your happiness."

Sanborn shrugged.

"I'll be happy," said he: "perfect happiness is the reward of mediocrity—but I mean to have my try for Mrs. MacDonald."

Florida's eyes were kind.

"I was only endeavoring to make you see——" she began.

"I know. You're a sort of cousin, aren't you?"

"We're all that. But it's distant. My mother was a Ridgeley, and of course Jane MacDonald is Calhoun Ridgeley's sister."

"Yes, you do well to mention him. I know he'll be my chief stumbling-block."

"He'll be a stone-wall, Mr. Sanborn—a stone-wall fifty feet high. He won't let you argue with him."

"Argue with him?" Sanborn's brows were elevated. "I don't want to argue with him: he talks with his hands. You can never answer the logic of a man that argues by gesture. He was born long after the war, but he's thoroughly unreconstructed. How could he be reconstructed? They tell me his father ran away at Shiloh—the first Confederate in history to turn tail from sheer fright."

He had meant to anger her, but he only partially succeeded. Her lips were pressed tight for a moment, but when she spoke it was with the soft flow of her previous speech.

"We're not proud of Cal's father," she said; "but we don't hold the father against his son, Mr. Sanborn."

Mark was softened.

"Miss Tréville," he asked, "don't you believe in heredity?"

"I ought to: I'm a southern girl; but I believe more in environment."

"Yes, but down here, the way you people live, environment amounts to heredity: you all grow up in the environment that made your parents whatever your parents were. That's the trouble with

Calhoun Ridgeley. You say yourself that his father wasn't a good southerner, and the townspeople say that he had such a temper that he never hesitated to shoot a slave."

"Cal's father was the sort of man that made you-all misunderstand slavery."

"Very well." He came closer to her. He spoke slowly; he was saying at last what, in spite of his previous declaration, he had really come to say. "Miss Tréville, you have been so good to me since I've been here in your part of the world—you and the Colonel and Mrs. Tréville—that I feel I ought to tell you something that I happen to know about Calhoun Ridgeley."

The girl drew back.

"I don't see why you should tell me anything about him," she said.

What was in her eyes? Mark wondered. There was smoldering indignation, certainly; but was there not something else? He had plainly intimated that what he had to say of her relative would not redound to that relative's credit, and this, he of course granted, she had a right to resent. But was the resentment solely the natural reaction of consanguinity? If it was, then, perhaps, he had better heed her words and be silent; but, since the day he first met her, he had seen enough to suspect in her a more than cousinly feeling toward the brother of the woman he had come to love, and what he now

saw confirmed him: it was more—he would go on.

“I must,” he said.

“I have told you that Cal was my cousin.”

Sanborn bent forward. He asked quietly:

“Is that all he is to you?”

The flush was on her face now.

“Mr. Sanborn!” she warned.

He took it quietly.

“I must tell you,” he insisted. “You see, I have a New England conscience. Have you never heard of a New England conscience, Miss Tréville?”

“Have you”—she met him as quietly, but quite as firmly—“have you never heard of southern chivalry, Mr. Sanborn?”

His motive was so simple that she must of course doubt it: he appreciated that. This girl and her people had been good to him. He came to their part of his own country more of an alien than if he had gone abroad—since no man is so little at home as he that finds himself in a strange portion of his native land—and these gentlefolk received him with the hospitality which, while it tacitly acknowledges a difference in kind, admits none in degree: that was the best of reasons, in common politeness, for holding his tongue. More: he loved and wanted to marry, as he had just now confessed, one of their relatives, the very sister of the man he was about to disparage, and this, in ordinary prudence, should have supplied the weightiest of causes for silence.



Sanborn was rarely impolite and he was almost never imprudent; he was neither a busybody nor a meddler; and yet, for the one reason that he had advanced, he was about to risk the imputation of the evils inherent in both these things and to accept, if need be, its penalty.

"I have heard a good deal about southern chivalry," he said, "but I have seen a lot more of southern common-sense. Of course," he went on, "I could say this to your father, but it's you that I want to reach."

Her brown eyes were steady.

"Why?" she demanded.

"Please don't let's press that point just now," said Sanborn. "I feel I ought to tell you: let that be enough."

"But ought I to listen?"

"How can you judge until you have listened? It's nothing that Mr. Ridgeley doesn't know, and it's nothing that I wouldn't say to his face. Miss Tréville, I'm only trying to repay your kindness to me when I tell you that I think you are too much interested in Ridgeley—*too much*, because the man's a coward."

It was, in all the circumstances, an amazing thing to say; nobody save a Mark Sanborn would have said it, but, all his life long, Sanborn had first made enemies and then made those enemies into the firmest sort of friends by pursuing precisely such courses:



which is to admit merely that, having a mind at once clean, fearless and logical, he habitually spoke it. This girl that had been a friend to him gave signs of being in love with a man of whom, for certain recent reasons, he disapproved: Sanborn considered that he owed her his conclusions.

The reputation of the man in question was, however, a factor in this little community that Mark did not, his serenity to the contrary notwithstanding, wholly appreciate—the reputation of the man in question and, for that matter, the background of the girl. Sanborn considered Ridgeley a bully and could never fathom the town's justification in regarding him as a person of courage; Sanborn knew Florida Tréville as the sheltered, if somewhat, though only instinctively, provocative, daughter of a cultivated house, and, in the days and nights now so close at hand, he was to see and hear much before he realized not alone that she worshiped strength and courage above all other attributes, but also that, gently as she had been reared, she herself possessed, even if in long restraint, physical powers remarkable in any woman and bravery the equal of any man's.

"A coward?" The accusation was so preposterous that she could laugh at it—laugh freely, good-naturedly, indeed forgivingly. "That shows that you're altogether wrong, Mr. Sanborn: you're so wrong there that you must be wrong in everything

about Cal. He has lots of faults, but he is as brave as he is big and strong."

The New Englander, however, was no man to stop at a task when it was but half finished.

"Good people," he said, "will tolerate any weakness in a man so long as he observes the conventions, and I suppose you like Ridgeley because he observes every convention you've got. But I tell you that this man has murder in his veins, and cowardly murder at that: he was made familiar with it when he was a boy, and now it's *in* him."

"I always thought you mistrusted him."

"I always did mistrust him. It was only because of you and your people that I gave him that job as a gang-foreman under me. I knew it would please you; and Dr. Pickens, General Wade and Judge Provost—all the community—as much as asked it. I knew I'd have trouble with him; I did have it right along—and now something really serious has happened."

A specific instance she had deemed impossible. He saw her quail. Somehow as if she felt what was coming, she breathlessly nodded to him to go on.

"Well, yesterday a negro in a hurry forgot to say 'sir' when he spoke to Ridgeley.—When I got to the scene of the row I had to pull Ridgeley away by main force: he'd already broken the fellow's jaw."

Mark had said it. He stood now, waiting its effect.

The effect was twofold, and neither phase of it was what Sanborn had counted upon. The girl's face was again crimson, but she was clearly trying to mask a deep emotion by an emotion more or less conventional.

"You don't understand niggers," she said.

"I understand discipline and I understand fair-play."

"Down here, if we let one of them once be impolite——"

Sanborn cut her short, but not rudely:

"We'll never agree on the negro question, Miss Tréville; but Tom Jackson—that was this negro—wasn't half Ridgeley's size, and yet, once the black man was knocked down, Ridgeley went on hammering him: it was then that the fellow's jaw was broken—*after* he'd been knocked down."

She looked at him, her brown eyes wide.

"Are you sure of that?"

"As sure as to-morrow's Palm Sunday. It happened just as I got to the spot."

"I—that was violence, Mr. Sanborn: it was violence and cruelty; but it wasn't cowardice."

Mark gaped.

"What? Why, what is all cruelty but cowardice?"

He saw now that her eyes had filled.

"Oh," she said, "you don't understand. But I do know it was hard for you to tell me, and I do

appreciate you for speaking. I—I'm ashamed of Cal for this; I'm right down ashamed of him—but, Mr. Sanborn, since you have gone so far, I've just got to make you see it all. It isn't cowardice; it's—it's——"

"Yes?"

She went to the big desk and opened it. There, beside the heavy old inkwell, lay a long thin mahogany case.

"Do you know Beaufain's Pond?" she asked.

He assented. He had passed several times—but only when he could not avoid so doing—along the borders of that melancholy tarn: its black depths, its moss-bearded trees, its gloomy silence had always sent a chill even into his practical soul. It was a spot designed for horrors, and of some horror he now expected to hear.

Florida was unhooking the long mahogany case. She threw back the lid and advanced toward Sanborn with the case in her outstretched hands.

"Look there," she said simply.

He looked first at her. Slim, erect, with an infinite pathos, a heritage of sad tradition in her eyes, and with the open case in her hands, she reminded Sanborn of the attendant priestesses sworn to serve at some Druidic human-sacrifice.

Then he looked at the case. A ray of the declining sun came in from the garden and fell, blood red, upon three long shapes of steel: three polished,

blue engines of death, bedded in the faded rose-colored silk with which the box was lined.

"They belonged to Cal's father," she said simply. "Two of them are dueling-pistols; the other is an old Colt revolver—a forty-eight. Mother got them, after Mr. Ridgeley's death. She said they oughtn't to be in the same house with Cal. Of course, he knows where they are, but at any rate they're not *on* him."

They were so incongruously fresh, so ominously ready: gleaming, silent, waiting. Mark looked at the deadly things, fascinated.

"With one of these"—Florida inclined her head toward the dueling pistols—"Cal's great grandfather killed his man—a man that had insulted him: they fought out at Beaufain's Pond. With the same pistol Cal's grandfather first wounded a man he had insulted and later killed another man because that other man had resented having his face slapped for looking too hard at a new coat that that Mr. Ridgeley wore. Cal's father used this pistol, too. He used it for the same purpose. He hated a neighbor that he knew was a poor shot; but he forced the man to fight and killed him. Once afterward he did the same thing. Then he bought the Colt and had the case enlarged. It was with the Colt that he shot some of his niggers. The niggers were valuable. People said he was mad. I don't know."

She closed the case and quietly restored it to the

desk. That done, she faced Sanborn with a wistful, crooked smile.

"So, though I'm ashamed of Cal," she said, "I always know he's never a coward, and I sometimes reckon his violence and his—his cruelty aren't just all his fault."

Mark was himself again.

"That's what I tell you," he persisted: "it's ground into him. He had before him the example of his fathers. They're a race of killers. People tell me that they used to call the old man 'Black Devil' Ridgeley."

There was a fresh pathos in her voice as she replied:

"Then you haven't—you won't discharge Cal, will you?"

"Does he need the job so badly?"

"He—" she hesitated but an instant—"Jane's husband left her a great deal, but Cal wouldn't touch that. Yes, he is very poor."

"Well," said Mark, "I haven't fired him. What I have done is this: I've told him that I'll fire any of the men that are proven uncivil, but that the next time Ridgeley lays his hand on one of them I'll fire Calhoun Ridgeley, too."

"Oh—and what do you want me to do?"

"Whatever you see fit."

She faced him squarely.

"You think I'm in love with Cal?"

"I think you shouldn't be."

"You do think I'm in love with him!"

"I think he is no more of a southern gentleman than he is a northern gentleman. After all, a gentleman is just one thing wherever he occurs."

She put her hand upon his sleeve.

"I know that," she said, "and yet——"

Sanborn gravely considered her.

"Ollie Witherspoon is both a southerner and a gentleman," he said.

The girl loosed her hold.

"Oh!" she cried. "What right have you——"

"None; I know. I simply usurp one.—To my northern senses the only thing against him is his Christian name, and of course he's not personally to blame for that."

"Now I do think you impudent."

"About Ollie Witherspoon's first name?"

"No: but I think you are impudent."

"I am your well-wisher."

"Did he——" she gasped at the thought—"did he dare to suggest——"

She couldn't finish it; but Sanborn understood.

"That I plead his cause? I've yet to hear of a southern Miles Standish."

Mark walked, in his turn, to the open bow-window. He looked out among the palmettos and the roses in full bloom. The sun was setting now, and the garden was bathed in a wave of warm crimson.



He knew that Florida would soften soon—and she did soften.

“But Ollie Witherspoon is so—well, he’s so thor’ly nice,” she was presently saying, “only he’s not just exactly exciting, you know.”

They had it back and forth then, she facing the old room and he the window.

“Is the adventuring quality so attractive in a man?”

“Of course it is, Mr. Sanborn.—And, anyway, Ollie’s a mere boy.”

“One soon enough outgrows that fault.”

“But he’s just my age.”

“Which is Mrs. MacDonald’s.”

“That’s another matter. Besides, Ollie has not—somehow, he’s never quite come out.”

“He will—and he’s no coward.”

“I’ve never noticed any conspicuous bravery about him, Mr. Sanborn.”

“Wait till he has a chance that really calls for it.”

“Well”—she was feminine to the last—“I don’t much care for him,” she said.

Sanborn’s gaze into the garden quickened.

“Here’s an opportunity to tell him so,” he replied.





## CHAPTER II

THE MAN IN THE GARDEN

“All the torments of the damn’d we find  
In only thee,  
O Jealousy!  
Thou tyrant, tyrant Jealousy,  
Thou tyrant of the mind.”

—DRYDEN: “Love Triumphant.”

## II

SANBORN drew back as he spoke; Florida came forward. A young man tapped on the sill of the open window with his riding-crop and, a moment later, entered the room: a young man some years younger than Mark—in puttees and horse-man's breeches—but without those outward signs of inward strength which can be called forth only by experience with hard fortune or hard work.

Ollie Witherspoon had, indeed, small requirement to know the nature of labor, and his acquaintance with ill-luck was limited as wealth alone can limit that gift common to all our kind. His own family, as was the case with all the families in that district, had lost its material possessions in the Civil War; but the Witherspoon then at the head of the clan—Ollie's grandfather—had possessed a resilience somewhat rare among his neighbors. He began, without delay, to rebuild immediately that ruin had been perfected, and he did his task well. His son, the parent of our young gentleman with a riding-crop, inherited both the old man's estate and the old man's energy: he completed his father's operations, and thus the grandson, though now alone in

the world, was alone in a world from which he could buy nearly anything he greatly wanted.

Since, however, about all he had heretofore wanted was a quietly easy and amusingly healthy life, he showed, as he now greeted Florida and her northern caller, none of the symptoms of that disease which we call wealth. He carried his head high; and, if his features had something of the delicacy of a girl's, if his ruddy face was the face of a high-strung boy, his body was strong, his eyes were manly and his air was the air of repressed power.

"Hello, Miss Flor'da," he said. "Hello, Mr. Sanborn. How're your pa and ma, Miss Flor'da? I know I'm *invited* 'round this evening, and I'm coming then, too; but I'd just been riding up the bay and thought I'd stop in here before sundown."

The girl met Witherspoon with more warmth than her recent description of him would have seemed to promise and, when both the men were seated in the low divan that, on either side of the old desk, ran along the bow-window, she hurried to fetch them a julep, returning at last radiant.

"Try that, Mr. Sanborn," she said, offering him a goblet, the green leaves of the mint just touching her firm white fingers curled about the frosted glass. "Try it and say there's nothing like it in the north."

The two men took their goblets, rose, bowed and began to drink. "Your own brewing, Miss Tréville?" inquired Sanborn.

"Yours," she informed him.

Mark's brows were puzzled. Witherspoon explained:

"Miss Flor'da means that Billy Turner made it," he said. "You see, Billy works for you-all days; whereas nights and off-days he's doing jobs 'round here like he always did."

Sanborn remembered the slim young mulatto. He was just Florida's age and had been the body-servant of her twin-brother until that brother's death five years before.

"But you're spoiling him with high wages, Mr. Sanborn," the girl declared. "He's so good at your work, he don't bother much about ours."

Sanborn finished drinking, put down his goblet.

"His hand doesn't seem to have lost its cunning in one direction," said the northerner; "there are no juleps like that in my home."

He started toward the door.

"You're not going?" asked Florida.

Her voice was low, but, to Sanborn's ear, there was that in it which told him that she did not want, just now, to be left alone with Witherspoon. He decided that what she feared would be good for her.

"I have to. You won't—" he took her generously proffered hand—"you won't think me a mere meddler?" he inquired.

She pressed his hand warmly. What she did not press was her entreaty that he should stay.

"We southerners aren't from another planet, Mr. Sanborn," she assured him. "I just know how well you meant it."

"And you'll follow my advice?"

"I'll think it over."

"Right! Good evening, Miss Tréville." He bowed to Witherspoon. "Good evening," he said, and left the room.

The girl walked to the Chippendale table. There was a tall vase on it ablaze with roses, and in these she buried her face.

"Mr. Sanborn has been giving me advice," she said.

Witherspoon raised his eyebrows.

"Is Mr. Sanborn," he began, "in a position——"

"He meant well," Florida interrupted. She paused a moment and then said: "It was about Cal."

"Oh!" said Witherspoon dryly.

"He said Cal—he said Cal had a bad temper," pursued Florida.

Witherspoon said nothing.

"And that he wasn't quite a gentleman."

Witherspoon coughed.

"And that he was dangerous; that he had—why, he as much as told me that Cal was born to do murder—Ollie, for *why* don't you say something?"

Witherspoon came slowly across to the table and fronted her.

"Because," he replied, "you wouldn't want to hear the only thing I have to say."

She looked up at him through the gathering twilight, her slim fingers resting on the mahogany.

"You-all make me terrible cross," she said. "You men just naturally take it for granted that I'm in love with Calhoun Ridgeley."

Witherspoon bit his lip.

"Aren't you?" he asked.

"I—I——" She blushed, but tossed her head.

"You ought to know that if there was any engagement I'd have told you right off."

"Because," continued Witherspoon, "if you are in love with him, whatever I might have to say ought not to be said, whereas if you are not in love with him, it can't matter whether I speak or hold my tongue."

"What nonsense, Ollie! Of course I'm interested in what one of my friends says about another."

"In that case, it is just this: I agree with Mr. Sanborn."

But what she had borne from the alien northerner, she could not bear in silence from a man of her own soil. She flashed into quick anger.

"I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" she cried. "You've no right to say such things behind Cal's back!"

Witherspoon came around the table toward her.

"Miss Flor'da!" he protested.



"I hate you!" she retorted.

Witherspoon put out his hand, but she did not take it.

"Miss Flor'da," he pleaded, "I'm sorry I said that, but you told me you didn't—that you weren't in love with Cal——"

"I'm not!"

"And so I felt free to tell you what I thought, 'specially when you asked me to tell it. Miss Flor'da, I wanted to tell you that—and something more."

The twilight was so thick now that she could not see his face.

"What is it?" she whispered.

Had she seen it, she would have admitted that, if it was boyish, it was at least the face of a boy very much in earnest. He came still closer.

"Don't you know? Can't you guess?" he asked.

She did know: even if Sanborn had not prepared her for this, the young man's voice would now have been in itself a revelation. She knew what he was about to say, she knew also what her answer would be, and how far that answer must be removed from his desire. Yet she let him go on. She could not help letting him go on; she was fond of him, even if she did not care for him as he cared for her; deep in her heart something rose and controlled her, something that mastered her tongue; it was not love—she was quite sure of that—because love, as she

dreamed it, was a consuming fire, and such a flame, if anybody could awaken it, would be awakened not by Witherspoon, but by——

She got no further.

“Flor’da,” he was saying: “I—I love you, Flor’da.”

Why couldn’t she stop him? Was it because of the darkness? Was it because of the scent of the roses from the garden? Was it some spell in the warm Spring air?

“I—I most always have loved you, Flor’da—I reckon pretty near always. And now—now I just naturally can’t stand to have you angry with me.” He was there between her and the open window, but her face was as dark to him as was his to her. “Flor’da, will you—will you——”

Then, in the darkness, she saw things denied vision in the light. It was, just then, for a moment only, but it served the present need. She said to herself—the words were flashed into her brain—that she was letting him go on from sheer vanity, from sheer pride of conquest, and from a mere love of being loved: she who, if she loved anywhere, loved elsewhere! She hated herself; because she hated herself, she would be as kind, as truth allowed, to him.

“No, Ollie,” she said—and her voice, though as clear as a bell, was as a bell that trembled. “I—I don’t; I won’t. It won’t do, Ollie. I——”

He cut in.

"Oh," he cried, "I understand! I know. You think I don't amount to anything. You think I'm just a boy. You think, because I've never done anything, I never can. It's my money's fault. I wish I was right down poor; I wish——"

"It isn't that," she said: "at least it isn't just that, Ollie. I oughtn't have let you go on, for it isn't just that."

"Then what is it? Flor'da, be honest with me. You're all I care about, all I hope for, all I want."

She was ready to tell him then—to tell him the little that she herself could, ever so dimly, surmise—but she was destined not, at this juncture, to do so.

"You're terrible good and fine and splendid," she began; "and, boy and man, you've always been wonderful to me—you sure have, Ollie—and I want you, please, to go right on forever and ever being my friend like you have been all these years; but, honestly, Ollie, I don't love you that way—your way, I mean—and if you do love me——"

Then she broke off short, with a little cry.

Witherspoon wheeled and saw, silhouetted against the gathering gloom at the open window, the head and shoulders of a bulky man.

"Flor'da," said a deep but velvet voice from the silhouette, "leave off your spooning and come here. I want for you to walk down Jane's way with me. This is Cal."



"FLOR'DA," SAID A DEEP BUT VELVET VOICE FROM THE WINDOW, "LEAVE OFF YOUR SPOONING AND COME HERE"



## CHAPTER III

“THE PESTILENCE THAT WALKETH IN DARKNESS”

“Le danger et les passions ne cherchent point l’esprit.”

—VOLTAIRE: “Dict. Philos.”

### III

THE interloper may have intended his speech for a jest, albeit a jest inevitably somewhat rude to his auditors, but, soft as was his voice, it bore an undertone heavy and almost sullen; and it was the voice of a man unaccustomed to trifling.

Without answer, Florida moved to the nearest scone and lighted the candle that it held. When the silence was broken, it was Witherspoon that spoke.

"Hello, Cal," he said, and in his manner there was the faintest hint of defiance. "You needn't have worried. I was just telling Miss Flor'da good-by."

He bowed easily to her as he finished speaking. The two men must have passed in the square hall, for the one had scarcely left the room before the other entered it.

Calhoun Ridgeley was a handsome man, but his handsomeness was of the sort that, though friends find it attractive, strangers are apt to consider sinister. Almost a giant in strength and stature, his movements were those of an overdeveloped physique, the ponderous awkwardness of the muscle-bound. His large felt-hat was gripped in a hand with fingers fascinatingly long and thick, hairy and



strong. His plentiful black hair was drawn straight away from a forehead high and narrow; his nose was like the beak of an eagle, and, over a pair of thick lips as red as a woman's, there fell a black mustache of that silky quality which has never been disturbed by the coarsening razor. He walked erect, and his manner was one of power, whereas, under thick eyebrows, his eyes of glowing jet were like those of one who tries to see light in dark places. Meeting him for the first time, a man would have mistrusted him; meeting him at any time, most women would have feared him; yet there was about him—and this was, of his all-positive characteristics, the most positive—that air of physical masterfulness to which every woman, and often particularly the gently-bred woman, sometimes succumbs.

"Are you coming along, Flor'da?" he demanded.

The girl, in the full reaction from her talk with Witherspoon, regarded him with her chin high. A dull anger stole, like the recent afterglow of the sunset outside, across the satin whiteness of her cheek.

"I don't know as I am," she answered.

"Come on," said Ridgeley. Whether he meant the words to be imperative or wheedling the evenness of his tone failed to disclose.

"I don't like your way of talking at that window," the girl continued. "I don't like your way of talking lately at all, Cal. A person would think

maybe you had some right over me. You talk just like you owned me.”

His hot eyes looked at her slowly.

“I wish I did, Flor’da,” he said.

She had never understood his power—those who feel power rarely understand it—but, in her clearer moments, which is to say when there was not propinquity to influence judgment—she realized at least that she saw him even as few of his friends and neighbors did and as no alien could see him. They—the friends and neighbors, and Florida among them—saw him in his proper place, in his picture; they saw his background, they knew his family-history, they took account, in viewing him, of the environment of his early life. They were, moreover, aware of what the rough man most successfully hides from strangers: his points, however few, of gentleness—along with his strong passions and his over-indulgences, they appraised the sporadic generosity, which was as strong, if not so frequent, as his spasmodic bursts of anger, and his affection for his sister, Jane MacDonald, which was as enduring as his melancholy. It was, nevertheless, Florida alone, with her traditional worship of bravery and her instinctive admiration for strength, who, because of that worship and that admiration, felt in him the potency of a mighty spell.

The big things, the strong things, spiritual and physical alike, had always drawn her and delighted

her: when she could awaken them to draw her and then at least seem to herself to bridle and drive them, the intoxication of the charm, the sweet thrill of the hardly-controlled danger, was proportionately intensified. She fancied that she had bridled and was driving them now: he had spoken so simply that she was softened.

"You don't own me," she smiled, "and, since you seem to know it, I'll walk down with you."

She pursed her lips in a long, low whistle. There was a crackling of stems from the garden, the sound of light leapings, and a wagging brindled bull-terrier leaped into the room. He ran, with little yelps of joy, from one of them to the other, the patent friend of both.

Ridgeley stooped to pat him, heavily, but with affection.

"I think Ted likes me 'most as well as he likes you, Flor'da," he said.

"He likes you some better," she answered. "He's a queer animal, for he doesn't seem to like Mr. Sanborn at all."

Ridgeley did not look up.

"Ted's got good sense," he commented.

She passed that by.

"To-day," she continued, "Teddy just snapped at Mr. Sanborn when he came up the walk."

"Sanborn's been hereabout to-day?"

"Yes, and I could scarcely blame him for wanting

to know why I didn't put a muzzle on Teddy."

Ridgeley rose. His heavy eyebrows had come together over his hawklike nose.

"Sanborn suggested that?"

She nodded.

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him that a woman who will muzzle her dog will gag her husband."

They passed, the dog now following and now leading, into the scented twilight of the garden. It was late March: the azaleas were in bloom, and the roses bent heavy with fragrance. All about them were live-oaks of a splendid age.

"I don't like Sanborn," said Cal.

"No? Well, I'm afraid he reciprocates your feelings."

"So he's been talking to you about me? No good, I'll wager."

She quite frankly wanted to hear his side—that was only fair. But she knew him too well to ask him directly for it:

"Why do you reckon that, Cal? Don't you get along right smooth with your boss?"

Through the shadows, he watched her moving beside him with grace, which is music made visible.

"You don't walk, Flor'da," he said, "you just move like a sailin' ship in a light breeze on a level sea."

She was pleased, but she was not to be diverted.

"Why don't you and Mr. Sanborn get along so well?" she persisted.

It brought him to a point.

"I told you once," said Cal: "I don't like him. What for's he been telling you lies about me?"

"Mr. Sanborn don't lie. He just told me you've been letting your temper get the better of you again, Cal—and that sounds to me kind of natural."

"I knocked down a impudent nigger, if that's what you mean."

"You broke his jaw after you'd knocked him down and then you fell on top of him and fought him like he was a white man."

"I didn't!"

"Oh, yes, you did! 'Most the only creditable thing about it is that you seem to be enough sorry for it to want to lie out of it."

"He'd have killed me if I hadn't plain jumped him," the man protested.

There are traditions that are stronger than those which prompt a worship of courage and power: in the gloaming Florida's brown eyes flashed.

"Then," she said, "rather than roll in the dirt with him like white-trash, you had ought to let yourself be killed like a gentleman!"

Cal felt the rebuke. He knew that, according to his own code, it was merited. He had been false even to his own standard. He gnawed his mustache and, for awhile, walked on in silence. Then

he spoke with his nearest possible approach to submission in his deep voice.

"Well," he said, "I didn't really get a fair swing at that nigger. I won't roll in the dirt with one any more; next time I'll crack the coon's skull instead of his jaw."

She turned her face away from him, pretending to call the far-scampering Ted, but when she once more faced forward she had conquered sobriety.

"Cal," she said, "sometimes you deserve what some folks think of you."

He hung his great head.

"I know it," he grumbled. "But I just can't stand being picked on. I'm no coward."

"No," she granted—and her eyes swept, in half-grudging admiration, his big body of hard flesh and sturdy bone—"you aren't a coward, and that's—yes, I reckon that's what I like you for, Cal."

"It's the only thing I like myself for. I'm no dancing man, may be, but I'm not afraid of anything on two legs, Flor'da."

Again she looked at him. He was not boasting: in order to regain her errant favor, he was as if merely stating—and she so felt it—an obvious and thoroughly accepted fact. There was no denying it—she was a woman too honest often to commit the weakness of self-deception—this man, whom she had known from his boyhood, always attracted her by his sheer strength and his exuberant use of it. She

had seen him tear a pack of bezique-cards between his hairy fingers, and she had seen him once, when an angry bull pursued her through a field, leap to her rescue, seize the on-coming animal by his lowered horns, stop him short in his charge and hold him there, butting, bellowing, but impotent, until she had climbed the distant fence to safety. As frequently as not, the man's strength was shamefully misdirected—she would grant that now—but this was because his strength intoxicated and conquered him. He squandered it, like a lad with youth and millions of dollars. He was still young—he was not yet thirty—and as most young spendthrifts come to their senses before they have seriously impaired their fortunes, so, she tried to hope, Calhoun Ridgely would become a genuine man before his strength had carried him to its end and his own.

The doubts that she had shown in her talk with Sanborn, the misgivings that she had of late begun to feel when she examined her own heart—all these mists were dissipated by the mere presence of the force that, when absent, inspired them. More than ever now, and precisely because she had been bred in a precise delicacy, the mere propinquity of muscular power had for her the irresistible magnetism of some deadly perfume. It was the cry for contrast that is certain to be heard in every breast too specially trained—the cry that, once heard, must be answered, will not be denied.



And yet, in spite of this—perhaps rather because of an epicurean delight in augmenting the hunger by delaying the feast—she played with him. She liked, gentlewoman though she was, to know that the might she at once desired and feared she could, at least for a while, tremendously torment.

"Afraid of nobody?" she asked. "I reckon you are afraid of me, Cal."

He looked at her—looked at her with a deep gasp of realization—and through the dark his black eyes glowed to a hotter flame.

"No," he grumbled.

"Never?"

He shook his head as a great child shakes its head against an accusation the truth of which it will acknowledge to none save itself.

A grinning imp whipped at her heart.

"Not a lil' bit, Cal?" she taunted.

They were walking slowly along a strip of roadway that, white by day, now showed as only a gray carpet between shadow-walls. Patches of woods rose at either hand. Languorous trees bent long branches close above their heads; the scent of wild-flowers stole lazily through the resting air; now and then there came, as from far away, the cry of some bird disturbed in its early rest, or the crackle of twigs beneath the padded feet of the disturber; but, save for these sounds of a lower life, the evening was silent: the whole world seemed asleep. Sud-



denly Ridgeley put out his big, hairy fist and seized her hand.

"Not much," he said, "because I know I could right soon make you afraid o' *me*."

His eyes, from the shadow of his wide-brimmed hat—from the shadow of their own bushy brows—were still burning ominously; his grip upon her fingers—perhaps only from an unconsciously severe employment of his strength—shot a sudden pang far up her arm to her shoulder—to her breast—to her suddenly whirling brain; his skin parched her. And yet she liked to see his eyes like that; she felt a wild triumph in the realization that the pain was not all pain; his hot palm thrilled her, even while it parched.

She looked at him, and then quickly away. Far ahead, Teddy was pretending to have flushed a non-existent animal.

"Let go," she said faintly.

He did not at once release her, but the sound of her own voice broke the power of his spell. Though he did not see it, she smiled—this time from the physical hurt of his fingers and the un-analyzed shame that had begun to work in her blood—the same crooked smile that she had smiled once before that day. What she felt now she could not have explained.

"And aren't you ever afraid of yourself?" she asked.

He dropped her arm. There was something rough in the way he dropped it.

"Why do you ask that?" he demanded sharply.

"Because I want to know the answer, Cal."

He pushed his hands deep into the pockets of his corduroy jacket and trudged on beside her, with his awkward roll, his face turned doggedly ahead.

"Yes, I am," he said at length—but even then his voice was a monotone—"I am afraid of myself—and you know why."

She did know. At many another time she would have pretended ignorance, would have goaded him, with the spur of light words, to his twentieth proposal and her twentieth refusal of him. But just now she was still, though she tried to hide it, breathing hard at her escape from she knew not what furnace of emotion. At its mouth she had tingled with the delight of peril braved before its scorching heat; but once away, she realized all that it had held of danger. She was blinded by the glimpse of its molten metal, and she trembled at the thought of another descent. She knew very well.

They were at last among the streets of the old suburb that lay between "The Palmettos," her father's house, and the city. She looked, in a not characteristic naïve endeavor to find a change of subject, toward the clustering white-pillared porticos, peeping over the garden-walls, about them. Their outlines blurred, their walls cloaked in luxuriant creep-

ers, their roofs uncertain, here and there a front gate demolished and here and there a chimney-pot visibly awry, the houses—pathetic, but articulate relics of the old order—seemed to be adequately voicing their protest against the new.

“These places,” she said, “look like tombs by twilight.”

He said nothing. She went on:

“They are tombs of a sort, aren’t they?—the daid homes of a daid race.”

Cal, it now struck her, was trying to conform with her new desires.

“A better race than ours,” he said. “I wish it was alive to-day—and we with it.”

She laughed a little.

“‘The good old times!’ ” she mocked. “I reckon Noah sighed out that same regret on Ararat. Come; here we are at your sister’s.”

They had approached a house that was so different from its neighbors as, in that part of the country, to seem even radical. All the houses surrounding it were of a pattern—as had been evident a hundred yards away, and as Cal and Florida well knew, their high roofs sagged as if under the weight of years and the memory of a glory long departed; their frame walls, bulging incongruously here and there across the building-line, seemed to shed, when uncloaked by the vines, all applications of paint as they should have shed, but appeared to fail to shed,

the frequent rains; and it was their sides that ran along the street, their faces fronting the gardens.

This one for which Ridgeley and his companion were making was, however, of a later type; it was even new. Standing well back from the suburban thoroughfare that had once been the chief residence-street of an independent town, it was reached through a broad lawn of which the grass and flowers showed the virtues of careful attention. The building itself had none of that discomfort of dignity, that starched, Sundaylike atmosphere of architectural propriety, which characterized its fellows. It was low, rambling, an easy matter of two and a half stories, with deep gables, weather-boarded and shingled. It had the liberalism of genuine grace and the effrontery of paint that was not twenty years' old.

"Anyhow," Florida, as she looked at it, almost seriously continued, "there is nothing of the good old times about Jane MacDonald."

"I know it," Cal admitted—and he spoke as one speaks of the family skeleton. "Lil' Jane, she's not a bit like the rest of us, and I just can't figure out why."

Florida laughed softly. She wondered what Cal would say now if he knew of Sanborn's intentions—what he would say, and what do, when he did know them. And Jane: different as she might in some respects be from her own people, Jane would scarcely,

Florida felt sure, prove so different-as to want to give Sanborn what he desired.

"I can figure out why Jane's not like the rest of us," said Florida. "She married one of her neighbors, like the rest of us do; but he had some money, like mighty few of us, and when he died, she used a little of it for travel."

"What's that? Travel?"—Cal's red mouth tightened under its silky covering. "Well, your pa's got money. I reckon when he dies you'll be traipsing off to Paris, too."

"I'm in no hurry to get it at that price."

"No, o' course not—but there's still some of your neighbors with money." He paused, and then added: "There's Ollie Witherspoon."

She looked up at him. He was crunching the broken shells of the garden-walk angrily beneath his booted feet; his face was lowering. She was not afraid of him now, but there was a contest in a breast: a contest that had been going on for a long time.

"I reckon you know I wouldn't marry a man just for his money, Cal," she said; "and I reckon you know I didn't mean Jane did such a thing."

They had come to the broad porch that rambled all the way around the young widow's house. The door boasted a transplanted knocker as old as the knockers that were native to all the other front-doors in that district, but the knocker to the house

of little Mrs. MacDonald was purely ornamental. Cal raised a big forefinger and stuffed it savagely against an electric button, which only long experience discovered to him, in the panel. That gesture, a condemnation of the object upon which it terminated, was his sole reply to Florida's protest.

A maid answered his ring—a maid with a white cap that stood out from the gloom and from a black face that faded into it.

"Howdy, Miss Flor'da," she said. "Howdy, Mars' Cal. Was you looking for Miss' Jane? She just gone up to you-all's own house, Miss Flor'da. I reckon you didn't come by the fields or you'd sure met her."

"How long ago did she start, Sally?" asked Ridgeley.

"Just about five minutes ago, Mars' Cal—maybe less'n so much."

Cal turned to Florida.

"Shall we walk back?" he asked.

"You should know," she said: "it was your errand."

"It was just to tell 'Howdy' to Jane," said Cal.

"Then we had better go," Florida declared. "I couldn't have stayed long, anyhow: I'm expecting company."

She was expecting Witherspoon's promised return—he had been invited forty-eight hours before—and dreading its likely renewal of his declaration. That

she did dread it, however, she would for no price have confessed to Cal.

"Who are you expecting?" he asked.

"Never mind," she smiled.

"I'm coming back with you."

"Of course; you wouldn't let me go alone."

"And when I get there, I may decide to stay."

"Very well," said Florida. She shrugged and then she laughed to the maid: "I hear you're thinking of a wedding, Sally."

The black face flashed her a broad, ivory grin.

"I dunno, Miss Flor'da," giggled Sally. "That there Billy Turner of yours is certainly getting mighty propinquitous-like around here."

They started away and, calling to the dog to follow, began to walk back, this time by the fields, to the Tréville house in the hope of overtaking Jane.

"I trust she does marry Billy," said Florida. "She is a good girl—everybody knows she's the one nigger around here that saves her money—and Billy, if he does spend all he gets, is a real steady boy."

"He used to be," amended Cal. "Nobody can tell how he'll turn out now that he's making all this money digging ditches for that Mark Sanborn."

The devil of argument tugged at Florida's sleeve: she hesitated, and was lost. She took up the cudgels for Sanborn, for the railway, for the new methods and the new time. She was in a sudden mood, in a gay antagonism, where she would have espoused



almost any cause of which she knew Cal to be an instinctive opponent. Her own training made her at one with him in his less extreme views, and her own logic reconciled her to this allegiance; but the temptation to bully this giant was always strong within her, and though there were long periods in which she did not yield to it, there were others when she found it wholly irresistible. Now, as if she dimly realized how close she had just been to acknowledging the power of his physical claim over her—as if, too, she unconsciously, but sharply, resented his exercise of that charm—she flew, for retaliation, to attacking the first prejudices that he chanced to display.

He protested. He debated. He quoted her former against her present self. He sawed the air with those awkward gestures of a giant to which Mark Sanborn had made a scornful reference. He riotously sent forth the call of the blood, the plea of the race. But Florida perversely continued to banter and bait him for the satisfaction of her own wounded vanity.

Their way lay along a zig-zag path through meadow land, thick with the coarse, salty grasses that grow in low ground by the sea. A quiet breeze from the neighboring ocean had come up, and this fanned their flushed faces and gently ruffled the live-oaks and palmettos that bordered the fields; in the distant west, across from the eastern horizon, where hung the low first evening stars, there trailed the last



faint edges of the royal robe of crimson that had been worn by the slow-departing sun.

"I tell you, Cal," she at last mocked him, "we're all behind the times down here, and we might about as well admit it. I am and you are—just like the rest of us."

His broad chest was heaving with the pain of her taunting arrows.

"You don't like us, do you?" he asked.

She looked up at him. He could not see her eyes, and so he missed the golden light of a quick tenderness that shot through their brown depths; and her words belied her glance.

"I'm tired of standing in one place all my life," she said.

He stooped to pull viciously from its roots a bit of weed. His fingers jerked at it as if anxious only to be busy with some sort of destruction. His monotone, however, was as tender as he could make it.

"Then," he said, "I reckon I haven't a chance, have I, Flor'da?"

This time she would hear him.

"A chance at what?" she asked.

"At you. Oh"—his head turned abruptly toward her—"you know what I mean, Flor'da—you know well enough! How often do you want for me to tell you that I love you? How often do you want for me to say it? I'm burning up inside for you, Flor'da—burning, burning all the time!"

He flung away the bit of grass, and—though they walked forward, without slackening their pace, toward where the path crossed a little creek close to the Tréville grounds—his speech ran uninterrupted:

"I can't keep it up forever, Flor'da—indeed, I can't. Something's bound to snap—it's bound to—and then"—his fingers worked convulsively; he leaned toward her, then tore himself away; his voice caught. A man would have understood that here was a fellow-being in a tremendous struggle with a dangerous passion—a man would have understood it, but only a man, or a woman that has understood men too well. "Won't you believe me?" Cal went on. "Won't you trust me serious-like? Flor'da, I—I love you so!"

Florida could not know. A glow of triumph that she was half ashamed of, overspread her whole body. This was not his former, not his usual, mode of attack. She felt that she had conquered him: the giant was humbled. She was rather sorry for Cal, and rather tender.

Yet, even as she felt thus, she felt something else. Under it all, but slowly rising above it all, there was the answer to his inherent sorcery, the response to the lure of his strength—a lure that remained potent even when the man himself was prostrate. Her heart bounded with pride, then ached with pity, and at last trembled with something that was not far removed from fear. And this was the thing that

had lain for so long in the back of her mind, in those regions of her soul into which she could not penetrate and would not dare to try; this, now emerged and face to face with her, urgent and momentarily becoming imperative, was her problem, was the one dark secret of her innermost self: the mastering impulse to give, rather the demand to permit herself to be taken, to be swept toward she knew not what, the world-old spirit that must have worked in the breasts of the Sabine women on the Italian hills—nay, in the hearts of the first women of the young world. Was it love?

“Cal——” she began, and then stopped.

He had come to a stand and faced her, his powerful arms outstretched.

“I love you!” he repeated. “Tell me I got some chance, Flor’da!”

The arms fascinated her. Something asked her why she should dread their fascination—why she should dread marriage to a man that thus attracted her.

“I—I don’t know,” she stammered. “Perhaps——”

“Flor’da!”

His cry was exulting. It was too exulting: it scared her, it half awakened her.

“I tell you, Cal,” she said, “I’m not sure—indeed I’m not. All the other times I’ve told you ‘No’; now I tell you the truth—as much as I know of it

now; all the other times I just put it right out of my mind; now I won't do that: I don't know. I—just give me a week to think about it, Cal. One week from to-day I'll tell you my answer."

He bent toward her. Again there were all the outward signs of a great inward struggle. Then, quickly, the last trace of appeal went out of Cal's voice.

"Very well," he said; "next Saturday evening, then; that's Easter Eve." And they faced again toward the trees along the stream.

As they did so, Teddy, who had been scouting ahead of them, gave a quick, staccato bark. Both looked up.

Through the trees, as they could just discern, the figure of a girl was coming, a basket on her arm. Opposite her stood another figure—the shadowy figure of a slouching man, evidently a negro. The man seemed to say something, the girl to protest. Neither, it was clear, was aware that they were not alone in the field. The man made a sudden gesture, and the girl uttered a little cry.

Cal's voice rose in a shout.

"My God!" he yelled. "It's lil' Jane—and a nigger—a *nigger!*"

With a wild bellow he darted down the path.

Florida saw the negro turn—saw him fling out his hands and push the girl so violently from him that she fell—saw the negro plunge into the trees.



## CHAPTER IV

### BLOOD-LUST

"Morality begins from an external or unrecognized conformity of interests, and ends by recognizing and adopting, as motives, the consequences which, in the earlier stage, seemed to be incidental or accidental consequences."

—LESLIE STEPHEN: "Luxury."

## IV

WHEN Florida's running feet reached the spot from which the negro had disappeared, Cal had the limp body of his sister in his arms.

"Is she hurt—oh, is she badly hurt?" gasped Florida.

"I don' know," said Cal. He, too, was panting—but not from his run. "She's fainted, anyhow. Go ahead of me. I'll bring her into your house. Light some more candles in the libr'y. Get some wine and a basin of water."

"And Dr. Pickens?"

"Not yet. Wait. He mayn't be needed."

In her moments of physical crisis—thus far mercifully few—Florida Tréville's heritage of strength and her love of bravery had never yet failed her: they did not fail her now. Whatever else she might at other times be, at such times she was a woman of action, and, however she might, at leisure, swerve between the love of exercising power and, in the presence of one man, the passing fascination of obeying power, she recognized, in emergencies like the present, the necessity of obedience. Beyond that one query in regard to calling the family physician, she now questioned not at all; she did not stop for in-



efficient tears or helpless inquiries into Jane MacDonald's condition—tears and inquiries that must entail a delay perhaps dangerous. Instead, still breathless though she was from her first run, she set at once upon a second. She dashed ahead to her own home and, by the time that Cal had reached it with his burden, she was ready to receive and care for the patient.

Ridgeley reentered the colonial doorway of the room he had so lately left, the body of his sister still in his big grasp. He bore it tenderly.

"Where's your pa and ma?" he demanded.

"They're in town at Judge Prevost's. They won't be back till late."

"That's good—no use disturbing them."

He laid his sister on a little lounge, and, Florida bathing the fainted girl's temples and Cal, gulping down a great draught of neat brandy from the decanter on the desk-top and pouring another for the patient's use as soon as she should be able to take it, they bent over her under the lights of the now fully-illuminated room.

Jane MacDonald was a frail, pretty little woman, with a face that, when alight with life, was at once pure and piquant. Her blue-black hair, disordered now, made a pillow for her shapely head and, as she at last opened her long-lashed lids, she gave her ministers a glimpse of eyes that were large and violet-blue.

"Are you hurt, dear?" repeated Florida. "It's your brother and me, honey. Tell us; are you hurt, you poor child?"

Jane shook her head.

"Shall I send Billy for Dr. Pickens?" Florida pursued.

Jane half sat up; she tried to laugh.

"Nonsense," she said. "I'm all right." She had spent not too much of her time abroad to have lost all traces of her native accent. "It was terrible stupid of me to faint."

She took a sip of the brandy that Cal thrust toward her and then, though slowly, sat wholly upright.

Her brother leaned forward with a glowering face.

"Who was that nigger?" he asked.

"Why, it wasn't his fault," said Jane. Still a little stunned, she looked slowly around the formal, candle-lighted room, from the walls of which the dead and gone worthies of the Tréville family stared down in unmoved dignity. "You see, I'd been over here with some of Sally's corn-bread—your mother's so fond of Sally's corn-bread, Florida—and just as I started back, this man stopped me by the stream. He said he'd lost his job on the road last week—that Mr. Sanborn had discharged him. He said he was hungry. He wanted some money, but I didn't have any money with me."

"Who was he?" Cal asked for the second time.

His tenderness had passed, or, rather, had been forgotten; he was bending toward her not so much as a brother might bend toward an injured sister—not so much, even, as a physician might bend toward his patient—but almost as the prosecuting lawyer leans forward to wrest an unwilling truth from a defendant in the witness-box. His very love for her and his natural desire for reparation, added to his carefully inculcated pride of race, had, in this freedomed soul, combined to loosen all that he inherited of prejudice, hatred, lust for blood. Perhaps his experience with Sanborn's laborer, and Sanborn's reprimand, assisted the process. In any case, here was indeed "Black Devil" Ridgeley's son.

"Who was he?" Cal once more demanded.

Jane made a petulant gesture.

"What does it matter who he was?" she countered. "Wait a minute, and I'll tell you—after you see it wasn't his fault."

"Not his fault! He laid his black hands on you!"

Everything that was uppermost in Ridgeley spoke in that phrase. He had his definite code, and, before his eyes, it had been violated. His particular sense of what constitutes honor, his especial, sometimes kindly, but always scornful, attitude toward the negro race—an attitude not wholly unprompted by a realization of that race's immediate numerical superiority—commanded one course of action, and one

only. Belittle the occurrence however Jane might, there remained for him the fact that she had been handled roughly by a black man. In degree, she might have suffered more, in kind the assailant was guilty of a capital offense. That was enough; all his being clamored for a vengeance complete and speedy: to have a member of his family, and a woman member, seek to palliate the crime—to have to stand by and listen to her attempts at palliation—that was too much. Even in order to learn the culprit's name, Cal could scarcely a minute longer control himself.

But Jane was continuing:

"I said he should follow me to my house and I'd give him some money, but that I hadn't any in my clothes. He seemed to doubt that, and he swore a little, waving his arms and repeating that he was nearly starved. But he was just going to follow me when you gave that awful yell, Cal, and then he was naturally frightened and started to run away. He jumped in one direction, but that happened to be where I was standing, and he accidentally pushed me over." She smiled again: "I am not very big, you know."

She had her hands to her head now, calmly rearranging her hair. She possessed the valor of her class, combined with not a little of the self-control of the cosmopolitan.

"I fell and was a little stunned," she concluded:

"so that you see the fault was yours, Cal, for yelling so, and not poor Jim Jackson's at all."

Ridgeley had another glass of brandy in his hairy fist. He drained it and returned the glass to the desk-top with a clatter.

"Ha!" he said. "Jim Jackson!"

Both women looked at him in flashing alarm. There, before them, he had undergone a terrible transfiguration.

The man's long, black hair fell about his face in angry folds, and on the face—the face that worked and pulled in the grip of a wild passion—the flickering candle-light cast a cool glow. The head was thrust forward, the chin out. The forehead was knotted; the eagle-nose was dilated; two faint spots of red shone at the high cheek-bones. The mustache seemed to bristle above the mouth, which was like a sneering wound; the muscles of the long throat were crawling up and down, and the eyes were twin coals of fire.

"Cal," cried Florida, "you wouldn't hurt him!"

The man threw back his head and laughed. His laughter echoed through the room—high, fierce, cruel, cracked.

"Hurt him!" he echoed—an echo that was a mockery. "Oh, no! Of course not. Oh, no; I won't *hurt* him!"

Jane sprang to her feet.

"Cal," she said, her cheeks going pale again, her

voice strained and low. "Cal, come to your senses. I tell you this man didn't mean to harm me."

He looked at her an instant as if not understanding her. Any thought, save that which possessed his brain, had to crowd its way to his consciousness.

"I reckon Jim Jackson knew what he was doing," he at last replied. "It was Jim's brother whose jaw I broke."

The two girls, both pale and trembling, had now drawn close to him. Jane's breath came quickly, and Florida's eyes were wide with horror.

"You can't imagine that he'd plan such a revenge, Cal!"

It was Florida that had spoken, but Jane at once took her up.

"He didn't plan it. He only asked for money."

The ugly smile on Calhoun's face curved upward until it held the cramped muscles rigid, distorting them into the likeness of a gargoyle, and showing, under his mustache, the teeth that glinted like yellow fangs.

"I know what he'd have *done* if I hadn't happened to be in time," said Cal.

"You're crazy!" cried Jane. "I tell you he didn't lay a hand on me except by accident."

The man appeared to make an effort to master himself, to argue for one moment with his sister, to confute her with a word. But the effort failed. The word could not climb through the tempest of

his passion. He could only whisper in a choked voice:

"You've been away from here too much to know these niggers."

Florida put her two slim hands on the corduroy sleeve. Through it she touched what was an arm of iron.

"I know them," she said: she had only horror for him now, but that she dared not display. "I know them, Cal; and I know you're wrong."

He shook her off, fiercely.

"*You've* talked too much to that nigger-loving Sanborn!" he cried. "Lemme go! Lemme go, both of you!" His rage snapped the last thread of restraint that opposed him. "I can't stop here to gossip with a parcel of women-folk!" he roared. "Get out of my way! You two women; one the daughter of Colonel Tréville, and the other my own blood-sister—one my cousin's child and the other my mother's, and both defending the black brute that laid his dirty claws—— By God, get out of my way, I tell you!"

With a sweep of his long arms he flung them to either side and started for the door.

The door opened: Ollie Witherspoon came in and closed it behind him. He was quiet, cool, immaculate in evening-clothes, and more boyish-looking than ever. Beside the overtowering Ridgeley, he seemed a mere child. He glanced from one to the



other of the frightened women. He did not look at Calhoun Ridgeley at all.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I was about to ring when I heard a noise—I thought there might be trouble——"

Florida pointed a shaking finger at the form arrested in mid-career before the new-comer.

"Stop him!" she gasped.

Witherspoon's calm eyes granted the hulking figure of Ridgeley one glance.

"Hello, Cal," he said. "What's the matter? Aren't you well?"

But he did not move, and the giant, with an awkward gesture, waved him to stand aside.

"Let me by!" he ordered.

"Miss Flor'da seems for to want you to stay here, Cal. Where might you be thinking of going?"

Ridgeley tried to smile.

"Nothing that'll detain me long: I'm only going to kill a nigger."

Witherspoon's face became suddenly mature. This was his own state, and he knew what, even from a Calhoun Ridgeley, such a threat implied.

"To kill——"

Jane MacDonald interrupted in a rush of broken sentences.

"Jim Jackson," she said—"he stopped me to beg—I had no money. Cal saw it from a distance and



didn't understand. We can't make him understand now. Cal called. Jim was frightened. He pushed me away. He didn't mean any harm——"

Cal was fast in the grip of his passion, of his prejudice, of what he thought he had seen. Before that, everything must go down. He bellowed for silence.

Jane, however, went on:

"He didn't mean any harm, Ollie. Florida saw it. She knows. Ask Florida."

Witherspoon turned to Florida.

"Is she right?" he asked.

"Jane's right," said Florida.

"You're quite sure?"

"Absolutely. I saw it all. I don't understand how Cal can think anything else."

"And now," panted Jane, "we can't make Cal understand!"

Ridgeley pulled himself to his full height, his face twitching, his whole great body shaking. He advanced to Witherspoon.

"What business is it of yours?" he demanded. "I know what I know, and I know what I saw. He laid his hands on my sister—on lil' Jane, do you understand? That black nigger! I know what he meant! I know why he had it in for us! I'd broke his low-down brother's jaw. What are you a-interfering for, you namby-pamby baby? If you was a southern gentleman you'd turn out and help me.

I'm going down to the tavern and get the boys and lynch this nigger!"

But Witherspoon, reassured by Florida's corroboration of Jane, was now wholly on the women's side, and wholly calm.

"If *you* were a southern gentleman," said he, "you would take your sister's word——"

"I take what my eyes see."

"And you wouldn't need help to kill one nigger."

"Get out before I throw you out!" cried Cal.

He wheeled suddenly to the desk, tore it open, took up the box of pistols, ripped off the lid and drew out the heavy Colt revolver.

"Now, then," he shrieked. "Out of my way—all three of you women!"

The girls ran forward, but he tossed them off. Witherspoon leaped toward him, but Cal seized him by the collar and dealt him, on the head, a blow with the revolver-butt that sent him hurtling into a corner—senseless. Then, with a final roar of rage, he dashed from the room.

An instant later they heard his heavy boots crash through the red-rose bushes in the garden.



## CHAPTER V

THE SHOT FROM THE DOOR

“Les injustices, les sottises et les cruautés ne frappent pas quand elles sont communes. Nous voyons elles de nos ancêtres et nous ne voyons pas les nôtres.”

—ANATOLE FRANCE: “Les Opinions de M. Jérôme Coignard.”

THE young man in charge of the construction of that portion of the St. Augustine and Richmond Railroad which ran through some of the land so long held by the Tréville family was far better qualified to understand his work than to understand the people among whom that work was at present cast. Mark Sanborn was born a thorough New Englander, the descendant of a family that had supported William Lloyd Garrison in the days when Garrison was mobbed in Boston; his college had broadened him a little, and his work more, but the college was north of New York, and, until he came to his present position, all his work had been on that side of the Mason-and-Dixon Line.

Now he often felt himself as more than confronted by a puzzle: he often felt himself a witless piece in a puzzle that nobody could ever solve. Sanborn had come South serene in the belief that the antebellum days and the days that ended them were alike ancient history, and that ancient history could not affect present. He had no conception that his native part of America was any better than any other part; he really believed that America, that any given country, was all one; but, because he held to this

faith, he encountered daily difficulties: he had not calculated the necessity for an American of one part of the land to make concessions to an American of another part.

As it would be easy for a visiting Southerner to quarrel with New Hampshire or to ridicule it, so, he perfectly realized, it would be easy for him, a New Hampshire man, to quarrel with or ridicule this portion of the South. But Sanborn saw the stupidity of such quarreling, and he did not want to ridicule the place: he wanted—what seemed impossible for him—to understand it. In that direction, he made really desperate efforts, efforts at once sincere and ludicrous. He tried to tell himself that the difference was essentially only one of tradition arising from a point-of-view, and he tried to gain that point. He failed because, all the while, a part of his brain was arguing that the point, gradually shifting with the process of time, must eventually conform to his native one—which he of course assumed to be the truly American—and because his upbringing had bent him to the theory of a single standard of life for all portions of an arbitrarily designed nation.

Yet he was not only a competent builder of railways: he was also a kindly man anxious to be liked and wholly incapable of disliking any person or thing that did not seem to him inherently and actively evil. By and large, these people had treated him

well; they had treated him better, he knew, than, as the representative of another order, he had any right to expect. Even Colonel Tréville had proved himself the courtly and gentle soul that he at first appeared to be, and this when Mark's railroad used its right of eminent domain to cleave a passage through the Colonel's land. With the possible exception of Calhoun Ridgeley, who had, indeed, thus far been only potentially an opposition, the entire community was more than well-disposed: it was hospitable.

Now Sanborn found himself in love with a member of that community—with the sister, in fact, of this Calhoun Ridgeley—and the puzzle promised to become more than ever puzzling. He could not believe that Jane MacDonald, so much more of the wider world than her relatives and neighbors, would, if she truly cared for him, refuse him merely on grounds of the sort that Florida Tréville had indicated. More than this, he was sure, from frequent talks on general subjects with men of the Colonel's type, that these men, here as elsewhere, appreciated enough clearly a time not their own to look with resignation, if not with approval, on such a match as that which he desired—that, in brief, they were less of their own generation than the daughters whom they had sheltered in their earlier traditions. But Calhoun Ridgeley remained.

Not that Sanborn feared him: his work had long



ago eliminated fear. Not that he expected Jane, other things being equal, to listen to her brother's prejudices. What further involved Sanborn's puzzle was, on the one hand, his knowledge that Cal was the present head of the Ridgeley family with all that, in this State, that position implied, and, on the other, the lover's wish to make his match without starting a family-quarrel. Sanborn was hampered by his decent feelings, like a great many other men in this contradictory world of ours.

Mark belonged to the sort of young men that develop methodical habits in early life—which is to say that Mark was of the type that succeeds. His work, of course, compelled early rising and regular hours from morning until sunset, but, when work was done, he was master. He could have passed highly intellectual evenings at the tavern, discussing local politics with the tavern's nightly customers, and nobody would have chastened him. The fact was, however, that he did not do this. Instead, he generally propped his stocky young body into a chair, lit a very short, black pipe and rumbled his red hair over a ponderous volume on some technical subject until the striking of ten o'clock, at which hour, no matter how thrilling his studies might have become, he regularly knocked out his pipe and went to bed.

Nevertheless, this process was not so virtuous as it at first glance appears, for Sanborn lodged at the

tavern, his room was just over the bar, and, the floor not being distinguished for thickness, he was generally enabled to hear most of the political discussions below while he was reading the technical discussions above. Indeed, the raucous voices of the drinkers-become-talkers frequently assailed him with a persistence that overrode inattention and made study altogether impossible.

Such an occasion was the evening that followed Sanborn's late afternoon-interview with Florida Tréville and his vain hints to her concerning the character of Calhoun Ridgeley. The company in the bar, if the New Englander was to judge by its shuffling feet, was an uncommonly large one; if he was to gauge its fervor by its voices, it was intensely in earnest, and, if the continual clang of the cash-register meant anything, the loafers were being at least adequately refreshed.

Mark was annoyed. He had not the slightest interest in the coming primary-election, and he had a great deal of present interest in his book—yet reading was rapidly growing impossible.

The situation became worse when somebody began whistling from the road. It was a long, low whistle—evidently, thought Mark, some rustic wooer signaling to one of the tavern servant-girls.

Sanborn turned a page and tried to forget; but the noise below continued, and the whistle outside was repeated. He noted, irritably, that, for all its

low pitch, the call was singularly penetrating. He refilled and lit his pipe, but the whistle came once more, clear, distinct, riding the waves of bar-room talk as a motor-boat rides upon a stormy tide. There seemed, it now struck him, to be something of warning in the summons—something of fear.

He put down his book and walked to the window. The moon had risen, and a little light from the tavern painted some of the roadway yellow, but much of it was still in the darkness.

“Mars’ Sanborn!”

The voice was a frightened whisper.

Mark put forth his red head.

“Who’s there?” he asked.

From the bushes along the road, a dark shape only slightly detached itself.

“For God’s sake, Mars’ Sanborn, don’t talk so loud!” it whispered. “This here’s Mars’ Tréville’s yellow boy, Billy. I work for you-all on the railroad.”

“Oh! Billy Turner?” asked Sanborn, compliantly lowering his tone. “What’s wrong?”

“I can’t tell you here, Mars’ Sanborn; but for the Lord’s sake, sir, come right down to the road and talk to me! Miss Flor’da—she done send me. And please—please, suh—come *quiet!*”

Mark, his heart beating high, turned from the room. For an instant his eye hesitated over the yellow pine bureau in the top drawer of which he

kept his revolver; but the fact that he did keep it there made clear his scorn of weapons; he went from the place unarmed, tiptoed down the creaking stairs to a side-door and was soon taking up a startled conversation with the trembling mulatto, in the shadow of the now moonlit roadside bushes, fifty yards from the house.

Billy was a handsome young fellow with a straight body and the trusting eyes of a devoted spaniel. Just now, however, he was short of breath, but long of words. In sentences that stumbled over each other's heels, he told the story of what Ridgeley and Florida had seen and of what the former meant to do: Mark could not doubt the story's authenticity. The girls, it appeared, had busied themselves with Ollie Witherspoon's wound and had sent Billy as their messenger to Sanborn with a charge to prevent the accomplishment of Ridgeley's purpose.

"But if he left 'The Palmettos' before you did," asked Mark, "how is it that you beat him here?"

"I done come the short way," the mulatto explained. "I swum the inlet and cut through the swamp. Mr. Ridgeley, he don't swim, and so I reckon he's coming the long way."

Sanborn saw that the messenger's clothes were wet. He remembered, too, that the swamp which Billy referred to was the breeding-place of rattlesnakes, and he recalled the superstitious horror in which the negroes held it.

"You're a brave fellow," he said."

Billy grinned.

"I ain't so brave as to want to meet Mars' Cal," he declared.

"Oh, but he wouldn't hurt you when you belong to the Trévilles."

Billy shook his head.

"Mars' Sanborn," he said, "you-all don't know Mars' Cal. Killing's in the Ridgeley blood, and Mars' Cal'd shoot anybody that tried stopping him when that there blood is a-working in him."

Sanborn slipped the man a bill.

"All right," he replied, soothingly; "don't you worry. Get back home as fast as you can. You can get dry there and you'll be out of harm's way. I'll attend to Mr. Ridgeley."

The mulatto bobbed his thanks. He plunged into the bush and was gone.

Sanborn, though rarely irresolute and now realizing well the imperative need of instant action, nevertheless involuntarily paused for an instant in the road. Here was the necessity to serve justice, here was a chance to serve Jane; but here too was a pretty kettle of fish for the man that did not want to increase the enmity of Jane's brother! Well—he shrugged his shoulders—what must be would be. On no account would he permit what he considered cold-blooded assassination. He turned toward the tavern.

Just then there came the sound of a man running from the opposite direction. As the man swung into the light from the windows, Mark recognized Cal Ridgeley.

Sanborn saw him fling open the door and enter the bar-room. A moment later there rose from within a hoarse chorus of rage. Mark leaped forward and darted in.

The room was low-ceilinged and narrow. It was ablaze with lamplight, thick with smoke and crowded with men. Two-thirds of the way along one side extended the bar, its mirrors covered by pink mosquito-netting and its rows of bottles agleam. Before it—so Mark had gathered from the sounds that reached him earlier in the evening—the customers had been lined two deep; others had been seated at the rough, round tables in the corners, and still more had been lolling against the fly-specked walls. Had been, but were not now, for now, their eyes red, their cheeks flushed, they were crowding about a disheveled figure in their midst: the topping figure of Calhoun Ridgeley, his face straining with hate, his mouth spewing forth imprecation.

Mark looked about him. The landlord was nowhere observable. Nobody had remarked Sanborn's entrance—the crowd was too intense for that—and the New Englander had time to observe that most of the bar's customers were men in his own employ.

"——tried to assault my sister!" Cal was shouting. "Choked her, threw her in the mud by the stream! What I want to know is, who's going along with me to lynch this black beast?"

For years afterward, Mark would try, from time to time, to go backward in his mind to that second at the tavern doorway and recall what then flashed through his brain. He never did recall it. Horror there must have been, since it was in his character to be horrified at such a threat—horror at it and anger against it. What else, if anything, impelled him, he could not guess.

Through the loud shouts of angry, volunteering men that responded to Cal's call, Mark pushed and shouldered his stocky little figure. Some of the men, now recognizing him, made way. Others he shoved sharply to right and left. He did not stop until he was looking up and into the evil face of the giant leader.

"Ridgeley," he said very quietly, "what do you think you're going to do?"

The giant wheeled. He blinked at this unexpected interruption. Then, realizing its nature, although not understanding its full import, Cal gazed at Mark with something of the derisive amazement with which Goliath must have regarded David. Behind Sanborn, the crowd closed up; it edged forward.

Cal was speaking to Mark:



"Get the Hell out of here," he was saying. "This is a place for men; it's no place for pigmies."

Back in the crowd, somebody laughed, but Sanborn only repeated:

"What do you think you're going to do?"

Ridgeley's face again contracted.

"I'm going to lynch Jim Jackson," he declared. "I'm going for to lynch a man you're by rights responsible for."

He paused; but Mark was not to be diverted from the main issue: he would not discuss his pay-roll, and he wanted Ridgeley to say his worst.

The silence was tense. Presently Cal resumed:

"You're corrupting the blacks 'round here, Mr. Mark Sanborn. I'm goin' to lynch one of your pampered-paid niggers."

A cry of approval greeted this statement, but the shout was followed by a pause which convinced Mark that his words, although uttered in a tone so much lower than Cal's, were at least commanding attention.

"Jim Jackson hasn't harmed anybody," he said.

"What do *you* know about it?" demanded Cal.

"I have had a message——" began Mark.

"Who brought it?" thundered Ridgeley.

"Never mind. The message——"

"Who brought it?"

"If you must know: your cousin, Colonel Tréville's servant, Billy Turner."



"Colonel Tréville's servant, but your workman!" Cal talked to Sanborn, but at the crowd: "And a nigger! One nigger lying to save another."

The crowd murmured assent to this. Why Mark did not think that the suggestion was possibly correct he did not stop to analyze; had he done so, he would merely have said that he knew Billy and trusted him.

"Since you force me to mention it here," he replied, "Turner came with a message from a member of your family."

Cal's heavy jaw dropped: he had not dreamed that Jane would use this device. But he hated Sanborn now and, as one is always anxious to believe the worst of the man that one hates, he may have thought that he was uttering a justified accusation when, thrusting down his face to Mark's, he cried:

"You're a liar!"

The crowd in the bar-room knew Sanborn as one whom it was dangerous to insult: he heard them gasp expectantly. His fists knotted, but he realized that Cal's intention was merely to provoke him to a fight so that he could the more speedily be disposed of. He did not reply to the epithet.

"You're a liar!" repeated Cal, emboldened by this unresponsiveness. "I'm talking about something that I saw with my own eyes, and all you're doing is trying to protect one of your own workmen." He turned to the crowd. "That's your

northern employer for you," he said. Then he went on to Sanborn: "You took his brother's side when his brother was impudent to me, and now here you are wanting to save Jim from the natural consequence of getting his revenge for his brother's broken jaw."

Mark inwardly congratulated himself on being able, so far, at least, to make Ridgeley delay action for talk. "I am not trying to save anybody from anything deserved," said Sanborn. "This fellow Jackson hasn't harmed a soul."

Cal laughed his strident laugh.

"Hear him!" he appealed to the shouldering men. "Where was he when it happened? I tell you I *saw* this nigger grab my sister, and I value my sister's honor——"

But there Sanborn interrupted. Into this thing, Jane's name must not again be brought. He still spoke calmly, but he spoke with a voice that carried to the four corners of the room.

"You value that lady's honor so highly," he said, "that you want to drag this alleged attack upon it into the newspapers, by means of a murder—you value it so highly that you make it a matter of bar-room conversation and tavern boasting. Shut your mouth, Cal Ridgeley—and keep it shut."

Ridgeley yelled. He launched at Sanborn a mighty blow that, had it landed, would have cracked the smaller man's skull as if it had been an egg-shell.

But Mark sprang aside, and three of the onlookers grasped the maddened Cal.

The giant swore and struggled in the arms that pinioned him. His captors feared him; perhaps they feared him too much readily to free him once they had laid hands on him; besides, they were in Sanborn's employ, and so they feared Sanborn, too.

Mark seized his advantage. He disregarded Cal and Cal's captors alike. He faced the rest of the crowd.

"I mean that," he said quietly: "I mean that a man who takes measures like this is crazy and ought to be treated as if he was. I ask you all as men if this is the way to help anybody's honor or reputation, even supposing that the person has really been injured?" Cal cried out again, but Mark deliberately kept his back turned to the writhing Ridgeley and faced his audience.

Some of his hearers nodded assent, some even voiced agreement; but it was plain that all were, in the last analysis, more afraid of Cal than of their employer, and that whatever advantage Sanborn had gained must be pushed home.

"There's nothing clearly known about this matter yet," Mark pursued. "I am not so ready to doubt Mr. Ridgeley's word as he is to deny mine, but he'll admit himself—I guess he has admitted—that, whatever occurred by twilight, Mr. Ridgeley was at a considerable distance and couldn't clearly see the

details, just as he certainly couldn't hear the words that may have preceded what he saw."

"I saw enough to satisfy me!" said Cal, from the background.

Regardless of this interruption, Mark went on:

"And yet he wants to kill a man on such evidence. You've known me, you've worked with me in good luck and bad. Have I ever lied to you? I tell you fellows solemnly that what I said is the absolute truth. I have had a message from 'The Palmettos' to the effect that Jackson only asked for a little money. Far from protecting Jackson or spoiling him by too high wages, I discharged him last week for drunkenness—you must, all of you, know that—and I suppose the fellow was hard up and hungry. Well, my message says he asked for a little money, and that Mr. Ridgeley, coming up from a distance, saw him, drew a not unnatural conclusion and shouted. Jackson was scared and ran away and, in running away, accidentally shoved the person to whom he was talking, and she tripped and fell. Why, it's a thing that might almost have happened to any of you!"

Again Ridgeley's voice rose from the background:

"Let's see your old message!" he challenged.

"Yes," assented some one in the rear of the crowd: "let's see it."

Mark half turned. "It came to me by word of mouth," he replied.

"Yah!" mocked Cal. "By a nigger's mouth! Of course a nigger'd stand up for his own color!"

But Sanborn resumed his appeal to the crowd.

"If there's any uncertainty—if there's any doubt," he argued, "you must see that you've got to wait till it's over."

Cal dragged his captors forward.

"That means wait till Jackson gets away!" he sneered. He addressed them all: "Don't you fellows know that every minute counts? As it is, we'll like as not need the dogs."

No gathering of men likes long debate when action—action of whatever sort—is possible. There was a shuffling of feet. Here and there rose a murmur of assent to Ridgeley's point of view.

Mark looked again, his blue eyes watching and weighing, about his hearers. He took mental account of his converts and their opponents, and realized that he must go further.

"Well," he resumed, "if you doubt the authenticity of my message, I'll put it to a practical test. I've said that you men know me; you ought to be willing to take my word. Now, tell you what I'll do: if you'll agree to stand just here—not to leave this room, and not to let Mr. Ridgeley leave it, till I get back—I'll go up to Colonel Tréville's house and hear what the other witnesses say. Then I'll come back here and give you their testimony exactly as they give it to me. If what they say is what my

message said, then I'll ask' you to let this fellow Jackson remain unhurt; but if they say that Mr. Ridgeley is right—if it turns out, as he thinks, that their message was distorted in Jackson's favor—why, then, though I don't believe in lynching for any crime of any sort, whether attempted or accomplished, I'll stand aside and let Mr. Ridgeley talk you into whatever he can."

Mark stopped. There was a consenting mutter.

Perhaps because they thought the matter settled, Cal's captors loosened their hold on him. Immediately he had freed himself. His violence seemed gone, but the succeeding calm was ominous, and as he sauntered forward there was contempt in his every feature.

"He's not going to the Colonel's," said Cal.

"He's going to warn the nigger."

Sanborn looked at his audience.

"I give you my word," said he.

Half the men stood by him:

"He's all right!" they chorused—"Of course we believe you, Mr. Sanborn!—He wouldn't do a low-down thing like warning a nigger, Mr. Ridgeley!"

"But think of the time," protested Cal.

"I'll be back here in twenty minutes," said Mark.

"If I'm not, you can go without me. Is it agreed?"

With one voice they assented.

"Why don't we all go?" asked a boy in the forefront.

Sanborn knew that it was easier to start a mob than to stop it.

"Because," he said, "to go in a crowd to a gentleman's house to question the people there would be an insult to that gentleman."

Mark had won. He strode to the door. On its threshold he stopped.

"And remember," he cautioned, "if any man of you in my employ breaks faith about this, he never does another stroke of work for the St. Augustine and Richmond Railroad."

Cal, his face livid with thwarted passion, came up and stood at Mark's side.

"You needn't fear," he growled. "No one but a fool'd go among Jackson's people alone. I'll not leave this room."

Mark, without answer, swung wide the door. As he did so, there was a scurry of feet from the outside, and, through the broad shaft of yellow light that was flung across the road, a dark form spurted to refuge in the bushes beyond.

"Some one was listening!" Sanborn involuntarily ejaculated.

Yes, some one had been listening. Some one perhaps forewarned. Some one, certainly, who knew not where to fly, who lacked the means of successful flight. Some one whom the fascination of terror had dragged here to listen to the discussion of his fate. Some one drawn, too, by the futile hope of justice



and controlled by the thought that to run away too soon would be to confess that of which he was not guilty. Some one had been listening indeed.

Cal Ridgeley, with a single movement, shoved Mark from his place. Like the statue of a malignant Justice, the giant stood there.

"Jim Jackson!" he cried.

There was no answer.

The crowd gathered at his back. Even Sanborn was startled into momentary inaction.

Ridgeley whipped the Colt-.48 from the belt beneath his corduroy jacket.

"I saw you, Jim Jackson!" he called. "Come out of those bushes!"

The underbrush trembled a little, as if in fear, but there was still no articulate response.

That pathetic movement of the shrubbery restored to Mark Sanborn his sense of reality. What had immediately preceded was too much for him. Although he had been battling against murder, he had been too short a time in this community to appreciate murder's presence when it became so suddenly, and by a totally unexpected turn of events, imminent. For just those few seconds, he was robbed of realization, robbed even of the ability to act: the thing was too horrible for his belief. Now, poignantly, the trembling of a bush gave him back himself.

"Ridgeley!" he warned.



The giant did not remove his gaze from the quivering underbrush.

"Shut up," he said.

"Ridgeley," said Sanborn, "if you don't put up that gun, either you've got to shoot me, or I'll shoot you."

He was unarmed, but he was unafraid. He would get that revolver——

Cal totally disregarded him.

"Jim Jackson!" he called a third time.

"Stay where you are, Jim!" shouted Sanborn.

He grabbed Cal's pistol-hand in his left fist; with his right he swung a stinging blow at the big man's jaw.

But Sanborn never knew whether that blow went home. The appearance of the quarry was more than the hounds could bear: one of the men that had so recently been supporting him caught Mark, from behind, by the collar. He was hurled, with a frightful crash, against the edge of the open door and crumpled into unconsciousness.

Calhoun Ridgeley slowly raised his arm. He leveled the gleaming revolver at the still trembling bush.

"If any man interferes," he said slowly to those behind him, "so help me God, I'll blow his haid off." He raised his voice: "Jim Jackson," he called, "for the last time I tell you: come out!"

There was a low gasp: if it came from the crowd

or the shrubbery none could have told, for just then the bushes parted, and into the yellow light there stepped, his empty hands above his head, wavering, nearly fainting, a man whose heritage was one of obedience: the man that had been listening at the tavern door—the man Cal sought.

He came slowly, but, as he came, Ridgeley lowered the revolver a hair's breadth and fired.

The negro pitched forward in the yellow light from the tavern-doorway.



## CHAPTER VI

“LOVE MAKES THE WORLD GO 'ROUND”

"I am love's borro'r, and canne never paie,  
But be hys borrower styлле, and thyne, mie swete, for aie."

—CHATTERTON: "Ælla."

## VI

PAINFULLY, Sanborn opened his eyes and raised his aching head. Somebody must have dragged him into the open air, for he saw now that he was lying in the road beside the tavern's wall. The moon was high, and, though the tavern door had been closed, the road was bathed in a white radiance. Everything was changed. Ridgeley had gone; everybody save Mark had gone; an absolute silence reigned where clamor had so lately sounded; peace had supplanted violence; the place was deserted.

And yet not quite deserted. Even while he was laboriously reconstructing what had so lately happened, Sanborn became aware of that. He became aware of something across the road, something that lay huddled in the pure moonlight.

He remembered everything. He reeled to his feet; he staggered over to the huddled body.

It was the body of Jim Jackson. The negro was dead.

Mark dashed back to the tavern. The bar-room door was bolted, but, never thinking of the other means of entrance, he hammered at it until the landlord thrust a frightened head from an upper window.

"Who's there?" he quavered.

"It's Sanborn," said Mark. "How dare you hide like this?"

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Sanborn."

"Nonsense. Will you let a thing like this happen in your place and not do anything about it? Get your clothes on! Come down here at once and go and notify the authorities."

The inn-keeper did not budge.

"What's happened, Mr. Sanborn?" he asked.

"Stop that!" Mark commanded. "Come down immediately."

The landlord leaned far out of the window in order that his now lowered tones might reach his guest.

"For God's sake don't try to make a fuss, Mr. Sanborn," he pleaded. "You don't know what it is you're trying to deal with—and you don't know who might be right now listening. Come in and go to bed."

Mark gasped.

"You're a coward!"

"I've got a wife and family," the inn-keeper sufficiently replied. "Take my advice, Mr. Sanborn, and come in. I daresn't talk no more."

He closed the window.

Sanborn beat again upon the door. He shouted, but the only answer was the echo from the words across the way. He was still beating and shouting

when there triumphed over his noise the sound of a galloping horse, and Ollie Witherspoon reined up just in time to prevent another tragedy.

Without a word of preface, Mark poured forth his story to the man with the bandaged head who had now dismounted beside him. The New Englander was in a spasm of despair, in a momentarily uncontrollable revolt against what seemed to him an unbelievable injustice.

Witherspoon heard him out and confirmed Billy Turner's version of the affair in the meadow. The southerner shared Sanborn's resentment, but his own sense of outrage was more practical: it was tempered by use.

"If I'd got here in time," he said, "I might have had some sort of influence, being kin to kin of Cal's; but, you see, he'd clean knocked me out. I only just came to ten minutes ago. It's all too late now."

"It's never too late for the law," said Sanborn.

"It's always too late for the law," said Witherspoon.

"You mean to tell me"—Mark could scarcely credit such a thing—"that I mustn't appeal to it?"

"I mean it'd be no use."

"But I saw this murder done—or almost saw it."

"You can't do anything," said Witherspoon. "It's too late. You can't bring Jim Jackson back to life."

"What I want to do is to prevent Ridgeley from doing more murder."



"Think of Jane—think of the scandal."

Sanborn had been thinking of Jane—even in his wildest moment, he had been thinking of her—but he had thought more of his sense of right.

"I can't help that," he said.

He swayed a little. He seemed again to feel the blow that had felled him.

Witherspoon noted the movement. He was all solicitude.

"Look here," he said: "your knock must have been worse than mine. Go to bed."

"No," said Mark, but he swayed again.

"Go to bed," Witherspoon insisted. "If you'll do that, I'll promise to have one of the tavern-boys—or two of them, for one wouldn't stay out here alone—stand watch by this body, and then I'll ride right into town and notify the coroner. It won't amount to anything, but I'll do it."

"And Ridgeley?"

"Well, as for Cal, he's so near crazy that I reckon we might manage some time to sort of shut him away, like. I should think his folks would prefer that—after this night's work. But it mustn't be right now. We must let this blow over first: we just can't have a scandal."

Sanborn was at last too weak further to protest. He was got to bed and lay there for hours wakeful, reviewing fatuously the events of the night and his possible courses in regard to them.

He loved Jane. From their second or third meeting he had loved her. He felt sure that, in some degree, she cared for him, and he was quite certain that he wanted her for his wife more than, for himself, he wanted anything in this world. But his conceptions of justice surpassed his personal desires. The welfare of his cause with Jane might demand that he keep silence concerning her brother before the law; the railway company would certainly frown upon any action of his that might antagonize this community. Well, he would have to risk all that and, if necessary, more.

The next day saw him up betimes. The landlord, to whom Mark's scorn addressed the fewest possible questions, said that the coroner had reviewed Jackson's body, and Mark proceeded to employ so much of leisure as the day's work allowed him in pushing his resolution. He saw the coroner, who proved to be a relative of Ridgeley and who talked much as the inn-keeper had talked on the night previous—and much as Witherspoon foretold. He called on the district-attorney, another relative, who, Sanborn was informed, was "out of town" and would not return for several days. He went to Jane's: Sally said that Mrs. MacDonald was not at home.

Sanborn scribbled on one of his cards:

"Are you angry with me?"

He handed it to the maid.

"Take that," he said, "to the lady who is not at home."

The card came back to him with a line in Jane's hand, written below his own message.

"No," she had written: "but I'm just now grieving too much to see you."

Florida Tréville, he next learned, was denying herself to all visitors. Ridgeley had not reported for work—there was a rumor that he had gone away. Meanwhile, Sanborn thanked Heaven that, for his own part, he had his daily tasks to perform. He went about them arduously and, as he went about them, he resolved not only to do what he considered his duty before the law, but also, and in spite of that, to win Jane.

Witherspoon came that evening to the tavern to see him. Sanborn talked of Jane, who, it seemed, had seen Ollie, when the latter called, but would not speak of what was most on both their minds. Florida's attitude to Witherspoon had been the same that she had adopted toward Mark; the only definite news of her was that she had not seen Cal, who, indeed, had disappeared.

About Ridgeley's movements, in fact, Witherspoon appeared so reticent as to excite Sanborn to a rather ungraciously close questioning. Reluctantly Ollie admitted that Cal seemed to have gone to pieces. He had spent the remainder of last night in town, drinking hard. Then he had vanished.

"He hasn't enough money to go far," said Mark. Witherspoon shifted uneasily.

"I reckon he could borrow it," he said.

Sanborn wrested the truth from him: Ollie had met Ridgeley, and the latter asked for fifty dollars.

"And you gave it to him?" cried Mark.

"Of course."

"I'll be damned!"

"But I didn't just *give* it: it was a loan."

"After he'd nearly killed you?"—Mark's tone added something more. It added: "And when he is your rival for Florida?"

Witherspoon smiled.

"You don't understand," he said. "Down here, for one's own sort of people, one just naturally does that sort of thing."

Sanborn's admiration was genuine. It was only his thriftiness that added:

"You may as well have kissed that half-century good-by."

Witherspoon flushed almost angrily.

"Not by any means," he said. "I don't want the money back, but I'll get it. Cal asked for the loan of it till Easter Sunday, and he certainly will pay it back not later than next Saturday night. He has his faults, Cal has, but he has a strong sense of honor, too."

Sanborn laughed outright—and immediately apologized.

But the days passed and what happened did not please him. What happened, indeed, was much what his first conversation with Witherspoon on the night of the shooting should have led him to expect.

In spite of its vaunted superiority to things physical, human logic is, of necessity, dependent upon the human senses: where the observation cannot detect the links that bind cause and effect, the brain denies all relationship between these phenomena. It was, therefore, but natural that, as time went by, Sanborn should declare that the killing of Jim Jackson had gone, and would go, unpunished. He told of it in his next regular letter to the aunt in Fitzwilliam whose house, as that of his sole surviving relative, he always thought of as "home."

His own part in the affair—not to lessen the truth of his failure, but in order to spare her from fear for his personal safety—he belittled. Then he went on:

"And, as a result of this murder, nothing happened—absolutely nothing. Why should it? The coroner here is Calhoun Ridgeley's cousin. So is the coroner's physician. The half of the coroner's jury that weren't his cousins by blood probably want to be his cousins by marriage.

"I think that Cal would have told the truth if they had called him as a witness, but they didn't call him—probably because they thought so too. Not one of those who testified had any clear recol-

lection of what had taken place. As for me, they evidently feared I'd be as truthful as Cal. Anyhow, they didn't call me, and when I insisted on being sworn and telling the facts—in spite of being asked anything but leading questions—they just gazed at the ceiling. It was the coroner himself who brought out the fact that I'd been knocked silly just as Ridgeley was about to press the trigger and so didn't quite see the shot fired. The jury finally brought in a verdict to the effect that poor Jackson—who, I dare say, was worthless enough, but who certainly deserved more of a run for his money—had 'come to his death while attacking the person of Mr. Calhoun Ridgeley, the said Mr. Ridgeley acting solely in self-defense.'

"Self-defense? Can you beat that? They might as well have said that Jackson died of the pip.

"What can a fellow do? The negroes are so subdued that, I'm told, Cal needn't even fear vengeance from his victim's brother. I'm no angrier at Ridgeley than I ought to be—oddly enough, and terrible as he is, he's a sometimes rather attractive fellow in a medieval, swashbuckling sort of way—and I'm in love, as you are probably tired of hearing, with his sister. But, anyway you look at it, my hands are tied. It's true, I've written a letter to the District Attorney in town, but then he's another cousin. Blood's thicker than powder."

He had thought it as well, since the first of the

week, to avoid both the Tréville and MacDonald houses, but, after mailing this letter, and because the day was a Saturday and work had ended early, he could not, just in the late afternoon, resist going as close to Jane as "The Palmettos." Sooner or later, in his wooing of Jane, if not for social reasons, he must resume his calls there: the Colonel was, after all, the husband of Mrs. Caroline Ridgeley Tréville; Caroline Ridgeley Tréville was the eldest relative of Jane MacDonald, and, though the relationship was sufficiently distant, it was sufficiently respected to make it, for the sake of family peace, incumbent upon any successful suitor of Jane to win the consent of the husband of Mrs. Tréville.

Mark walked up the long driveway. There was something almost consciously wistful about the very air of the old house, and something quite unconsciously wistful, he was sure, about the air of Colonel Tréville and his wife, who were sitting on the white, high-pillared veranda facing the garden, as Sanborn entered it.

"Good afternoon, sir, good afternoon. I am glad to see you. We have not had that pleasure for these several days."

The Colonel had risen to greet his visitor with an air none the less hospitable because he had, at heart, no particular fondness for this young interloper. He was a tall man, the Colonel, whom age was making spare, but was leaving upstanding, and



his mane, which he had a way of shaking grandly in argument, made a silver frame for his still ruddy face.

"I've been frightfully busy," lied Mark.

He bowed to the prim, white Mrs. Tréville. She was a diminutive woman, quietly vivacious in the silence that she nearly always maintained, save when discussing family and relationship. Her face looked as if it were chiseled from ivory; she was in the youth of old age.

"You see," Sanborn added, "we've just finished the cut through your meadow, Colonel, and have quite completed the curve through that land of General Wade's."

"I'm right sorry the General has to suffer," said Mrs. Tréville, "though of course his place isn't what it used to be. His father married the great-aunt of my cousin, Jeff'son Ridgeley's second wife, and I can just remember what it was in his day. He was a ve'y prominent and ve'y influential man. It was his sister, Fannie May, that became the second wife of Senator Gregory and the mother of the Geraldine Wade that married Gov'nor Beaumore in the days when it was somethin' to *be* a senator and a gov'nor."

She rose, excused herself on account of domestic duties and passed into the house. There had been, and Sanborn felt that there would be, no mention of Calhoun Ridgeley or Mark's part in the tavern-



tragedy. He began that process of "sounding" the Colonel which he felt now to be necessary.

"I hope Mrs. Tréville doesn't feel hard toward us," said Mark.

The Colonel's eyes twinkled.

"Meaning you?" he asked. "Or meaning the railroad?"

"Oh, hang the railroad!" laughed Sanborn. "I guess the 'us' was editorial."

"Hang the railroad?" the Colonel repeated. "With all my heart, suh—if I only could—but, as for the editorial 'us,' why, seeing that we just naturally can't hang the railroad——" He stopped, smiling.

"You just naturally want to hang me?" asked Mark.

"Not *hang* you,"—the older man's smile faded and left his face old and reminiscent—"but suppress you, my boy. You see, you can't hardly blame us if we're not too fond of these times and these methods of which you are, unfortunately, the local representative."

"But that's it, Colonel: I am only a representative. I'm no more responsible for the road that hires me than is a brakeman, or anybody else that works for it."

"Nobody has to keep alive by doing a kind of work that he's ashamed of, sir."

"On the contrary, Colonel, nowadays, nearly

everybody has to do some sort of work that he's ashamed of—if he wants to keep alive."

But the Colonel had been born before the Economic Interpretation of History. The Christian that is in the majority believes in the infallibility of only two human beings: the Pope and himself.

"Then, sir," said the Colonel, "nearly everybody ought not to remain alive."

This seemed final enough, but Sanborn had the scientific mind; he tried again.

"At the bottom of all your economics," he said, "is your insistence on birth."

"It is, sir." The Colonel shook his belligerent mane.

"Well, I don't undervalue birth, you know, but after all, birth is luck, worth is the man."

"Indeed? Well, sir, I think you will find that birth generally produces about ninety-nine and one-half per cent. of all the real worth in the world."

Sanborn felt his cheeks becoming the color of his hair.

"Then," he argued, "you discount nearly all that America has done in business and finance."

"Most willingly, sir!"

It was nearly too much for Mark's temper; his only safety lay in laughter.

"But think what American business has done for this earth," he said: "from Paris to Nagasaki you find 'American Bars'!"

It was, of all people in the world, Jane MacDonald that, at last, saved him. The little widow came up with another basket of Sally's cornbread and insisted upon carrying the willing, but amazed, Mark to the farthest corner of the garden as soon as she had sent the Colonel into the house with her gift.

Sanborn, as he followed her to a hidden bench in a tangle of roses, decided that he had never seen her more fetching. Her cheeks were flushed by the light, salt breeze; the mild sunlight filtered through the arching foliage upon her blue-black hair. Had she resolved to put behind her all thoughts of last week's tragedy? He could not tell: her eyes, though still sparkling, were as nearly serious as her eyes could ever be.

"Why haven't you come to see me for all these days?" she demanded, looking up at him with a mouth that was deliciously—was it insolent?

Mark shifted uneasily on the old stone bench.

"Can't you guess?" he asked. "It's for the reason uppermost in all our minds—which is why we, none of us, refer to it."

Jane was immediately grave; but she met him bravely.

"You mean this terrible thing that Cal has done?"

He bowed assent.

"I called several days ago," he said, "and—don't you remember?—you wouldn't see me."

"Ah, then," she said. "Then I didn't know. I wasn't sure. I wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt."

"Him?" Sanborn echoed.

"My brother Cal."

"And now?"

There was a long pause. Twice he tried to repeat his question, and twice the words would not come. Then Jane said:

"Now I know. I have been told all about it, and if Cal had come to see me—well, I wouldn't have come down to *him*."

"Oh," Sanborn protested, "but he is your brother!"

She turned upon him the full battery of her mature beauty. Her head was high, her mouth firm.

"Mr. Sanborn," she said, "we're friends, you and I, and I am going to talk to you like one friend to another. The reason you northerners misunderstand the South is that you judge us by a whole body of fables based on nothing at all: you think we are a race of hot-headed, sentimental fools. We're not; we are uncommonly like the rest of mankind, and, like the rest of mankind, there's here and there a mistake among us. Cal's one of our mistakes."

Mark reflected that this was a gentle way of putting it; but Jane was soon to dispense with gentleness.

"I'm sorry for him," she continued, "but I look at what he did pretty nearly as you do, and I don't see how you could have acted about it other than you did act. Perhaps—" she permitted herself a smile—"perhaps that's because nothing came of it and because nothing could have come of it, down here, from the beginning; but, theoretically, I'm with you. Anyhow, if Cal behaves like a half-crazy man, he ought to be treated like one,—my brother, indeed! That's the very reason I won't see him. The idea!" She pulled a faded rose from the nearest bush and began plucking its withering petals. "You know," she went on, "that he is in love with Florida?"

Here was unexpectedly easy sailing! "I guessed it," said Mark.

"Well—I don't want him to have her. I don't think he deserves her. I'm ashamed of my brother! I want her to marry Ollie Witherspoon."

"Be careful," cautioned Sanborn, with a smile; "whoso makes a match loses two friends. There is only one thing more dangerous than recommending a doctor, and that is recommending a husband."

"I don't care. She is too good for my brother. I long ago told him that she doesn't care a straw about him."

"And doesn't she?"

"I haven't the least knowledge, but I am afraid she sometimes cares a great deal—only I had to

discourage him; that was my plain duty. Who can help lying? In this imperfect world, lies are always so temptingly ready to one's hand—especially to women's."

"I see; there is more fiction than poetry in the modern girl. I wonder how Miss Tréville——" He paused abruptly.

"Can care at all for Cal?" she courageously took him up. "It's her fantastic admiration for brute strength: I might as well be frank about it. It's his very roughness that is attractive to her very refinement. Sheltered women are often like that."

"Does the Colonel guess?"

"Neither the Colonel nor Mrs. Tréville; and now the Colonel has—has just cast him out for this—this shooting. The Colonel says Cal has proved false to all the best traditions of the South.—And I suppose he *has* proved false.—Of course, I'm not *sure* about Florida's caring for him, but——" She clasped her hands.—"Oh," she broke off, "to think that I've got to talk this way about my own flesh and blood!"

He looked at her, hesitant. When he had elected to oppose Ridgeley on that fatal night in the tavern, he felt that he was lessening his chance of winning Jane. When he volunteered his testimony at the inquest, he assured himself that he was throwing away whatever of chance remained to him. He performed both actions simply because he thought that

he ought to perform them, and now, to his amazement, it appeared that they had affected his standing with her neither one way nor the other.

"Are you sure," he asked, "that you are quite in earnest about your brother?"

Her eyes were big with wonder. "Of course I am."

"And that you don't resent my part in the affair?"

"Why should I?"

"Do you really know what I did?"

"The whole countryside has been talking about it, and so of course I know you did your best to save Cal from committing murder and that, even at the last, you would have given your life to save this negro's."

"But at the inquest I volunteered testimony that ought to have hanged him!"

"You did it all," she said, "because you thought you were doing what was right. Of course, I wouldn't want Cal to get into any serious trouble with the law, but then"—her voice grew shy—"you didn't succeed in getting him into any trouble at all, you see."

"So I am to have all the credit of doing right and none of the discredit of doing harm?—I wonder——" He hesitated again; then he took a sudden plunge: "I wonder if you are so unprejudiced a person as to be able to care for me a great deal?"

She looked at him from a corner of her eyes.





*Gilbert Matzke.*

SANBORN BENT SWIFTLY FORWARD AND KISSED HER LIPS





"You might try to find out," she whispered.

Sanborn bent swiftly forward and kissed her lips.

"Mr. Sanborn!" She drew back, half in astonishment, half in laughter. "Have you ever done such a thing before?"

His own laughter rang free.

"When a girl asks such a question," he said, "she betrays the fact that she has a standard of comparison. Jane, do you think I can measure up to your standard? I want to marry you."

Her answer was to put her head upon his shoulder. So Florida was wrong, and he was right: geographical distinctions made no difference to Jane!

"There is only one thing in the world that could make me love you better," he went on, holding her tight in his arms, "and that would be that you shouldn't have so much money. I want to be able to win my own way—I want to fight for both of us to fortune."

She drew her head back, smiling.

"If a man wants to be a model lover," she said, "he mustn't try being anything else. You are going to have a harder time to get my relatives' consent than you have had to get mine."

"That doesn't worry me." He squared his stocky shoulders. "To be sure of winning is to be halfway to victory."

"The Colonel will think that his consent is necessary, Mark."

"Oh, I'll chance the Colonel!"

"And then, you know, there's Cal."

He bit his lip. To his clear eyes these formalities seemed rather ridiculous.

"Yes," he admitted, "there's Cal. Just where, by the way, is he?"

"Now? How should I know? I am rather afraid he is somewhere where he shouldn't be. The gossip goes that this killing has affected him more than anybody that didn't know him might suppose it would, and Sally tells me—tells me dreadful things, Mark. He's been nobody's certain where; but Sally told me a little while ago that she heard he'd been seen again, headed for the tavern."

Mark reflected.

"This talking to Cal—my talking to him, I mean—we may have to regard it as a mere formality, Jane."

She laughed a little.

"It's likely to be nothing else."

"He won't consent?"

"He never will. You don't have to ask him, Mark! I didn't for a minute mean you should: I only meant that other people around here would expect it of you. Don't do it."

"I have a fancy," said Sanborn, "for following the Roman's customs so long as I'm in Rome—and so long as those customs are within the law."

"You mean you'll ask Cal?"

"No, I stop short of that. I won't ask him: I'll tell him."

His happiness softened her.

"Oh," she said, "I don't want to misjudge him, and I know I've been perfectly horrid about him. I haven't taken into account all the things about him that other people, not so near to him, have taken into account: his upbringing, his traditions, his——"

"You escaped them."

"Yes, but that was only my good luck. And, really, he has been always sweet and tender to me."

Sanborn rose.

"But where are you going?" demanded Jane.

"I am going to tell Cal."

"This minute?" she faltered. "Why, you've only just told me! Is there such a tremendous hurry, dear?"

"My experience has been," said Mark, "that there is always a tremendous hurry if one is to get what one wants in this world."

He kissed her and started for the tavern.



## CHAPTER VII

### TAVERN-ETHICS

“Tout sermon est ennuyeux.”

—VOLTAIRE: “Correspondence.”

## VII

CALHOUN RIDGELEY was, as Jane had guessed, in the bar of the dingy tavern. He had not run away after the shooting, for he was quite clear that there was nothing to run away from; but he had gone into the town for that hectic relief which the situation seemed to him to require, and he returned to find himself in an equivocal position with his own people. He was virtually cast off by his sister, who really loved him; Colonel Tréville, who represented all those old Southern ideals that Cal's better self most adored, had condemned his action as the work of a bravo and a betrayal of southern traditions, and Florida, though he was resolved to see her, he had not yet dared to approach. That was why he went back to the town, and that was why he was now at the tavern; it was the reason that, in town, at one saloon or another and now near home, he had been, for pretty much all the time since the night of Jim Jackson's death, drinking hard.

The week of dissipation had done its work thoroughly, as dissipation generally will: it was with something of a shock that, as Sanborn now entered



the tavern, he observed the change which the past few days had wrought in the man that was just then the bar-room's only occupant.

Ridgeley was seated at a table in the shadowy corner. His broad-brimmed hat was pulled tight over his long, lank hair to the level of his heavy eyebrows. His lean face was a dirty white; its beak seemed thinner, its lips, under their long mustache, more than ever like an open wound. The man's great frame was clad in corduroys that were in need of cleaning; his big, hairy hands shook as he raised his glass to his mouth, and his eyes shone a baleful red. No man could look at him now and understand how any woman had ever found in him anything to attract her.

Sanborn nodded familiarly and, hiding his disgust, took the chair opposite that occupied by the giant. He had said to Jane that his mission was to inform Cal of the intended match, and this was true; but, in his own heart, he had another purpose and a far stronger one: he wanted to use his utmost endeavor to bring this man to a sense of decency; he wanted to give Jane a brother of whom she need no longer be ashamed. Pleading would not do it, for Cal was long past appeal; but Cal did have a sort of pride peculiar to himself, and Mark hoped that an attitude of scorn might work upon this pride to some good purpose.

"Hello," he said.

Cal's red eyes considered him suspiciously.

"What the Hell do *you* want?" he demanded.

Sanborn leaned so far back in his chair that his brilliant locks brushed the fly-specked wall. He lit a cigarette.

"I want to marry your sister," he said.

He had expected an explosion, but none came. Cal, with a shaking hand, merely poured another drink from the bottle at his sprawling elbow, drained his glass, wiped his silky mustache with the back of his hand, and replied:

"You can't have her."

"All right," said Mark cheerfully. "That's settled. It was a form I had to go through with, you know."

Cal's eyes widened a little.

"You mean you'll give her up?" he asked. "I thought you wanted her—but you mean you'll throw her away? Do you want to insult us?"

"Oh, no; I merely mean that, having asked you and been refused, I'll now ask Colonel Tréville, and keep on asking. I shan't be discouraged; it took many days of trumpeting to raze the walls of Jericho."

The giant glowered.

"Sanborn," he said, "I can overlook what you did a week ago and at the inquest, but if you marry my sister, I'll shoot your damn' haid off."

"I don't believe it," said Mark. He blew rings

at the ceiling. "And," he presently added, "I've a mind to give you some advice."

"I don't want it."

"Nobody does. Still, giving advice is my one dissipation. I observe that you have others."

"What do you mean now?"

"Simply that a fellow that has put himself into the position which you've walked into is inevitably beset by one sure temptation—simply that, and that you don't seem to be resisting it."

"Resisting temptation? Ve'y fine, no doubt, only it 'pears to me that we may get something for what we do, but powerful lil' for what we don't do. We're rather meanly rewarded for our restraints in this world."

"How do you know? Ever tried any?"

"I know this world. I ought to; I'm a man of the world, I reckon."

"When a man says he's a man of the world, he means he's a man of the half-world. Ridgeley, did you ever think about the next one?"

Cal took another drink. When Sanborn had entered, the giant had already consumed enough liquor to dull his animosity from the fine edge of action to the mere bluntness of the native and stubborn. Now, however, he began to come upward—at least so far as to the mettle of complaint.

"The next world?" he mocked. "By God, Sanborn, sitting here in this low-down bar-room, you

look as virtuous as the average sinner when he gets into his Sunday clothes."

"You mistake me," said Mark—he was still perfectly at his ease; his blue eyes were almost dreamy—"you mistake me; I wasn't trying to put the fear of Hell into you; I was merely trying to discover if you had a realizing sense of the fact that, some day or other, wherever you go, you've got to die."

"Well, I'm in no hurry about it."

"You seem to be. And I should think that, if you don't care what happens to you after you've gone, you'd at least care a little to leave behind you a name that was worth a few years of remembrance."

Ridgeley, it appeared, was willing, if not for argument, at least for more or less abstract speculation. It was plain that he vaguely mistrusted Sanborn's present attitude, but it was also plain that his other objections to Mark had, for the time being, floated serenely out of his head. He drank again.

"Good or bad," he inquired, "what does it matter that my name survives, if the thing for which the name was *only* a name has perished just utterly?"

"Oh, I don't acknowledge that the rest of you does perish," countered Sanborn; "but whether it does or doesn't, you ought to realize that a few people who want to care about you will keep on living upon this earth after you leave it, and that those people have a right to expect that you'll leave them something that can be remembered pleasantly."

Ridgeley sniffed. He drank again. ~

"Upon my word," he replied, "you're actually getting the clerical voice: a tiresome mixture of the drone an' the whine. Are *you* so ready to die?"

"I am in less of a hurry than you appear to be. Anyway, I'm not taking quite so much trouble to kill myself."

"I reckoned you weren't in a hurry. Some way, all these pious folks who are so certain of getting to Heaven are never in any rush to take the train. When I go, I'm going by my private express."

Sanborn looked at the sodden giant and, involuntarily, shivered. It was not fear; he said to himself that it was not even the potentialities for active evil which a vicious training and all its inherited memories had stored in this huge carcass. It was rather an instinctive sense that, wreck as this man was, he was a dangerous wreck, a wreck in the destined channel of a half-dozen lives, only partly sunken, wholly, even if only negatively, perilous.

"You don't seem," he said, "to have the slightest fragment of the sense of social responsibility."

"No?" replied Cal agreeably. "Well, *you're* not deficient, anyways. It 'pears to me, Sanborn, that you are one of those men who have a moral sense abnormally tender to the vices of other people."

There was just enough truth in the criticism to nettle Mark; but he had his work to do and so he tried not to show annoyance.

"I don't think I'm unduly merciful to myself," he retorted.

"All right, all right. I'll grant that your conscience is a tyrant to you; but when a man's conscience is a tyrant to him, it is a bore to his acquaintances."

Sanborn checked his irritation altogether and decided to attempt another attack. There might be something in appeal, after all. He loathed Ridgeley more than ever now, but, since the law would do nothing, and since his common-sense told him that Witherspoon's suggestion of an asylum for a man so legally sane was absurd, he remained resolved to do what he could to prevent his sweetheart's brother from further disgrace to Jane MacDonald. The thought that Cal might marry Florida Tréville was repellent; Sanborn was still an advocate of Witherspoon's suit in that quarter, but, on the chance that Cal might really love Florida, Mark launched his fresh attack on the giant's better feelings.

"Ridgeley," he began, "will you try to remember my motives, and so to keep your temper, if I speak to you on a very intimate subject?"

Cal eyed him with the old suspicion reawakened in his blood-shot eyes:

"Now," he said, "you're going to be insulting. Whenever a man is going to be insulting—'less he's mad and don't care—he begins by intimating that his motives are damn' high."

"I'm not going to be anything if you don't want me to. I only want to pull you up a bit."

Ridgeley laughed bitterly. Still, with a trembling hand, he poured himself a drink.

"Oh, all right! Fire away, sir."

"Well, then, I suppose I am right in assuming that you are in love with Miss Tréville?"

The giant's cheeks flashed into a violent red. He swept his glass from the table and leaped to his feet.

"What business is that of yours?" he demanded.

"None," said Sanborn, without budging—"unless you make it so."

"Then don't you interfere!" thundered Ridgeley. "I reckon you think because you don't like me that I'm not fit for her. I reckon you think I don't know how to love. Love? What do *you* know about it, you poor, little, timid, ice-water-blooded, slow-moving runt, you?"

At the mere mention of Florida a tremendous emotion had shaken him. He must have been brooding over her for days—for every day since that when she had asked him to wait a week for her answer. Waiting is hard for men like Calhoun Ridgeley: it feeds the fires. Now it was as if the sound of Florida's name had flung open a great door and admitted a swift draught to the furnace of his passion. Pride he had, but not the restraint common to most pride.

"Love her!" he choked. "Don't I give up my



work because, for love of her, I can't work? Don't I sit day-long in such a room as this, brooding, thinking of her and nothing but her? When I do go to bed, don't I toss about sleepless for thinking of her? Don't I have to get up and tramp the streets or the roads and fields and swamps—looking at her window, looking at the stars, looking at the sea—tramp and tramp and tramp, a-trying to walk it down and never succeeding? Who are you, Mark Sanborn, to ask me whether or no I love her?"

Mark was a lover himself, and he could pity this one; but he was Jane's lover, and so he must be firm. With another cigarette between his lips, he waited until Cal's breath had failed.

"One of the differences between love and self-love," he then remarked, "is that love has sometimes been known to hold its tongue." Ridgeley, still shaking with passion, was towering above him. "I suppose you wouldn't want any one else to marry her?" Sanborn inquired.

Cal's hairy fist crashed upon the table.

"I'd kill the man that married her!" he swore.

"Even—even Ollie Witherspoon?"

"Him quicker'n any one!"

"Though she loved him?"

"She don't love him!"

"And you'd be willing to marry her even if she did?"

"I'd take her at any price."



"Jealous? I see. And of her mere body, of course. We all overlook the desires of the spirit, so long as the flesh hasn't obeyed them. As if it wasn't the spirit that counted! However, that's not my point." He rose slowly and, on his feet, looked up at the contorted visage before him. "Ridgeley," he said, "I don't mean to insult you; I am speaking in all kindness; I believe—" he was, unwillingly, about to tell what he felt to be the truth; mentally, he asked Witherspoon's forgiveness—"I believe you might have a chance with Miss Tréville if you'd only take yourself in hand."

The liquor in Cal was, for the instant, softening him. His monotonous voice grew almost tender.

"Miss Tréville," he said, "will marry nobody but a real southern gentleman."

"That's just it," said Sanborn. "If you don't straighten out, she won't marry *you*. She may not marry you anyhow, but she certainly won't so long as you remain what you are."

There was every reason for expecting that the reply to this would be a blow, but Cal merely sneered.

"Sanborn," he asked, "do you reckon by any chance you know a southern gentleman when you see him?"

"Yes, I know one quite well."

"Indeed? And may I inquire who this paragon may be?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, who in thunder is he?"

"Morgan Witherspoon."

Ridgeley turned abruptly and walked up and down the dingy room. At last he stopped, again facing Mark.

"Any more?" he asked.

"Oh, yes—lots: General Wade, Colonel Tréville, Judge Prevost, Dr. Pickens—the vast majority of southern men."

"And you don't honor me by a place in your li'l list?"

Mark, wondering if his life depended upon his answer, shook his red head.

But Ridgeley, to Sanborn's amazement, only grunted. Emboldened, Mark went on:

"You're not a type; you're a disease. You're one of a few little sores that have broken out, here and there, on the healthy body of the South. If a man has fifty pimples at the same time, his blood is in a bad condition, but one or two don't show that there's anything wrong with him, and there are not enough of you, so far as I've seen, to justify a doctor in prescribing for the South. As a matter of fact, there are as many of you above the Mason and Dixon Line as below it, only those below are, individually, a little larger. But they are wrong, wherever they are—north or south—and nobody hates them more than southerners."

The sneer was fading from Cal's face.

"Go on," he said shortly.

"That's all," replied Mark. "You are merely the sort of men that would ruin the South if there were enough of you—but, thank God, there aren't; and the decent people, as they can, and predestined evolution, as it must, are going to solve all problems in spite of you."

Ridgeley resumed his walk. When he came to the bar-window, looking out upon the road, he stopped. Billy Turner, the young mulatto that had once been the servant of Florida's twin-brother, and the brave messenger that had warned Sanborn of Jim Jackson's impending doom, was passing, and Cal now called to him.

The man entered. His large, spaniel-like eyes were wide, and fright wrote itself plainly on his face.

"Wait a minute, Billy," said Cal. "You'll pardon me," he continued to Sanborn: "there's a note that I must write and send by this boy."

Mark nodded. He saw Ridgeley sit down at the table nearest the window, produce a notebook from his pocket, scribble a few words on a sheet, tear that out, address it and hand it to the mulatto.

"There, Billy," said Cal; "take this to the address I've written on it. You can read, can't you? Oh, yes; I remember: Miss Flor'da taught you years ago. Well, take this to the address I've written. Here's a——"

He stopped in some embarrassment; then, after

a breath of hesitation, he crossed the room to Mark.

"I beg your pardon, Sanborn," he said, in a voice too low for the mulatto to hear, but in a tone from which one could not have concluded that there had ever been any difference of opinion between the two whites: "I beg your pardon, but I find myself unexpectedly short of funds, and I'd be ve'y much obliged to you if you'd just give me the loan of two-bits for this yallow boy."

Sanborn suppressed a smile and produced the money. Cal returned to Billy.

"Here's some change for your work," he said. "Now, mind you don't be lazy getting it there!"

The mulatto touched his hat.

"Any answer, Mars' Cal?"

"No—no answer. You needn't come back."

Turner put his hand upon the door-knob, but Mark called to him.

"If you want to earn a little more, Billy," he said, "you might come back anyhow—come by way of the tailor's, if that's on your road——"

"It is on his road, Sanborn," said Cal.

"All right, come that way and bring me my clothes that are there to be pressed for Easter."

Billy hurried away, and Cal, for a few minutes longer, resumed his interrupted walk. At length he again approached the table by which Mark still lingered and, picking up the glass that he had knocked to the floor, sat down with another dram

in his hand. He bowed gravely to Sanborn, over the liquor; then, with a simultaneous movement of head and wrist, tossed it off.

"I thank you," he said.

"The money?" asked Mark. "Oh, don't mention it." He noticed a hesitation in Ridgeley's eyes: "If any more would be useful——"

Ridgeley raised his hand:

"I don't know; that's what I'm studying about."

Sanborn sat down, found a fresh cigarette and began to smoke. He did not want to risk diverting Ridgeley's thought by a too close scrutiny; he looked, therefore, at the blackened ceiling; but he wondered to whom that note had been addressed; he wished his own code of propriety would permit his making inquiries of Billy Turner when Billy Turner should have come back, and he was puzzled over the problem of just what fruit was laboring to birth from the seed that he had sown in the soil of this young giant's slow mind.

Presently Ridgeley spoke.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I have been somewhat preoccupied and worried about a number of things these past few days, and I'm not quite myself—so I believe I never asked you to have a drink."

"No harm done," said Sanborn cheerfully; "I really don't care for anything."

He tried to keep all feeling from his voice, but Ridgeley was suspicious.

"You think I've had enough?" he inquired.

"Well," said Sanborn, "since you ask it; yes, I do."

Ridgeley smiled.

"I'm afraid, sir, that you underestimate my capacity. The landlord frequently leaves me in practical charge of the bar when there's not much business—or when it's fair-day in the city—and I simply try to see that he doesn't lose anything by the rarity of customers."

He fell silent again, moody, while Mark, still unwilling to interrupt, smoked more cigarettes. At last, with a little premonitory cough, Cal spoke.

"Of course," he said gently, "I ought by rights to knock your haid off."

Sanborn bowed in acknowledgment of Ridgeley's restraint.

"Don't mention it," he said.

"And of course," pursued Cal, "I'm by no means prepared to admit, just yet, either your qualifications to marry my sister or your right to judge of my actions."

"Oh, *de gustibus*, you know!"

"Yes. But what I mean's this: I don't care whether I'm the nose on the face of the South or a pimple on the end of the nose. What I want to do is to marry Miss Tréville, and I do feel that maybe she looks at this matter of Jim Jackson's death about the way that you look at it."

"I have every reason to believe that she does."

Ridgeley straightened up in his chair. It appeared that he intended the movement to be symbolic.

"Well," he said, "if you're right, I mean to give myself a boost up."

Mark eyed him narrowly. Did he mean it?

"I'm glad you feel that way about it," he said. "There's no reason why you can't."

"Oh, of course there's no reason why I can't; the only question is whether I want to."

Sanborn had heard that sort of sentiment expressed more than once before, but he did not say so. Ridgeley went on:

"So I've decided that if Miss Tréville wants me to change my opinions and mode of life, I'll change them."

Mark rose and put out his hand.

"Good," he said. "Will you shake?"

Very gravely Ridgeley took the proffered hand in his great, hairy paw. He squeezed it until Sanborn nearly yelled with pain.

"And now," asked Mark, "about that money?"

"Quite apart from our personal differences?" insisted Cal. His entire manner had changed. Even his words were weighted with a heavy formality.

"Oh, quite apart from that," Mark readily agreed.

"Well, sir, I should be ve'y much indebted to



you if, seeing as how I intend to resume work for you on the coming Monday morning, you'd lend me the loan of fifty dollars to pay a little bill that I owe hereabouts. Payment of debt will start me right on my new course—supposing there's to be one—and payment I should make in any case. For your part, you can take it out of my pay at the regular rate of two dollars and fifty cents a week."

Sanborn was amused. Moreover, he doubted the wisdom of entrusting the man with quite so much money.

"Can't you wait till Monday?" he asked. "I haven't the cash at hand."

"I'm mighty sorry," said Ridgeley, with polite firmness, "but the debt is one of honor and a delicate one. I am forced to pay it to-night, and, considering my relations with the creditor, I should greatly prefer to pay it in specie."

Mark began to feel as if it were he that owed this man money.

"I don't see how——" he began.

"Suppose," suggested Ridgeley, "that you send Billy to cash the check at the station—the ticket-agent knows you. I have to meet a man at the foot of Beaufain's Pond. Tell Billy, when he comes back, to bring the money to me there."

Sanborn made his decision.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "Don't think that I wasn't willing——"



"Not at all, sir, not at all. You really won't join me in a lil' liquor? I regret it. Mr. Sanborn, my regards!"

He had poured himself a long drink, and, when he had swallowed it, he walked, with steady step, out of the tavern and down the road.

Mark stepped to the door and looked after him: the first scouts of the twilight were creeping up the sky; their faint shadows were kind to Ridgeley; they stripped him, at this distance, of some of the signs of his dissipation. Was the man really intending to turn a new leaf? Sanborn wondered. Could he turn it? How strange were his ideas of honor! The fifty dollars, of course, were to repay Wither-  
spoon's advance; but was Cal indeed to meet Ollie at Beaufain's Pond, and, if so, why had such a place been chosen?

## CHAPTER. VIII

### THE TIGER STRIKES

“How shall a man escape from his ancestors, or draw off from his veins the black drop which he drew from his father’s or his mother’s life?”

—EMERSON: “The Conduct of Life.”

## VIII

**R**IDGELEY'S note was addressed to Florida. It reminded her of her promise to give him his answer this evening, and it told her that, as he understood that her father did not care to see him, he would be waiting for her, within the hour, on a spot which they both knew at the foot of Beaufain's Pond.

Florida read the message with mixed emotions. She had been revolted by the wanton killing of the negro; the reaction had made her regard with horror, not only Jackson's murder, but herself that she should ever have felt a tender emotion toward Cal. Yet she considered herself in honor bound to meet him and give him his answer, and, running like a sunken river through the depths of her soul, was the dread lest, should she see him, something of his old power over her might somehow, even now, be renewed. Morally and physically, the man was, at this moment, hideous in her eyes. But mankind does not always worship beauty; since the dawn of time, the hideous has not failed to inspire human reverence: most idols are ugly. Moreover, though among the lowly love is an emotion of the heart, among

the lofty it is an exercise of the imagination, and Florida's imagination was strong to rule. She decided that she would see Ridgeley and give him her refusal by word of mouth.

And she would tell nobody of her intention. She had been alone in her room when the note was brought to her; none but the servant was aware of its delivery; nobody at all, save herself and its writer, guessed its purport. In her parents' present state of mind, to tell them that she was going for an interview with Calhoun Ridgeley would be to court her mother's appeals, and to face her father's commands, against it. The thing could all be over in thirty minutes; it should be over in thirty minutes. She tore up the note: she would keep her promise and tell of it only after she had kept it.

She passed down the abruptly-turning colonial stairway and through the hall that ran the length of the house. Her father had remained on the porch since Sanborn's departure, and his wife had joined him there.

"Are you going to sit here with us, honey?" asked Mrs. Tréville.

Her voice was always gentle, it was more than ever gentle in addressing her daughter, and it was most gentle now. Partly these elder people may have, in spite of Jane's surmise to the contrary, guessed something of Florida's feelings for Cal; wholly they were sure that those feelings now had

ended. They knew that, in any case, Florida had suffered with them in the disgrace which they felt her cousin had brought upon the family.

"No," said the girl, but she did not look up; "I think I'll go for a lil' walk."

"Better sit down here and rest yourself," the Colonel suggested.

"O, daddy dear, my haid aches so. I reckon I've had about too much rest this last week," Florida appealed. "I surely need the exercise." She waited their smiling consent, received it, descended the porch-steps and faced the rose-garden. "But I'll be back in half an hour," she said.

She sauntered along a path that led to a side-gate, opening upon a meadow, and she called Teddy to follow her. The long grass curled about her rapid feet. As she turned, with the dog scampering at her heels, into the deep woods of drooping trees that stretched all the way to Beaufain's Pond, a soft salt breeze sprang up from the harbor, red now with its reflections of the inland-setting sun. Her home was behind her; on the other hand, but farther distant, was the suburb where Jane lived, and from there—from among its quiet houses, its silent lawns and empty streets, all green and white with the still blue sky above and the still blue water close at hand—somewhere, through the slowly-descending darkness, an old church-bell rang its rhythmic call to the service for Easter Eve.

She knew the way as well as it was known to the bull-terrier beside her. The spot was a hidden one, but Jane and Cal and she used, long ago, to play there as children. A tall lithe figure in vestal white, her chestnut hair uncovered, the satin smoothness of her cheeks just touched with the pink of health, her brown eyes like the pools that dotted, here and there, her way, she trod, under low branches and over a moss-covered earth, the once familiar path.

But it was a very lonely way—she had never before realized how lonely. The thick trees shut out nearly all that was left of the fading light; the underbrush rose like twin walls about the narrow path; and, when she reached the tarn around which all this dank vegetation centered as if to hide the almost stagnant water from the healthy world outside, she seemed to have stepped upon another planet: a planet dead and cold and forgotten.

There was little more light here, for the tree-tops nearly met across the black surface of the pool. Withered limbs stretched out of the forest's shadows; damp foliage sweated against a gray sky; vicious creepers crawled up mighty trunks, embraced them and slowly strangled them; long beards of moss trailed, from invisible branches, into the thick and slimy pond. Even the animals common to most such places seemed to shun this one, for the silence was profound. Florida felt, but could not see or

hear, the presence of reptilian life. The air was heavy with poisonous odors. She started as she saw the man that she had expected to see.

He was waiting for her by a flat rock that sloped slowly to the water's edge; the dog leaped up to lick his hand. Cal's hat was at his feet, and, though the deepening twilight dealt gently with him, softening the ruder effects of what he had been through, Florida could see in his eager, eagle face something of all the changes that the week had wrought upon it.

A little cry caught in her throat. In spite of herself, pity replaced every other feeling for this former playmate of her childhood, now so plainly broken upon the rack of his own passions.

"Cal," she said in her sensitive contralto, "aren't you well, honey? What you been doing to yourself?"

She put her fine hand on his sleeve as she had put it there a week before. Now, as then, she felt beneath the corduroy an arm of iron, but now the iron shook from a tense, suppressed emotion as a steel cable trembles from the charge of a heavy current.

Instantly he seized her hand in both of his—seized it and held it and hurt. The dog, who had curled himself in the sparse grass a few yards off, stirred uneasily.

"Flor'da," gasped Cal, "Flor'da!"



Something seemed to strangle him. His black gaze burned into hers, and for a moment he could not speak. But he tossed his head and at last, with straining throat, went on:

"I couldn't have waited another minute, Flor'da—not another minute. I think that, all this time, I've been mad—mad!"

His emotion choked him.

"Call!" she said.

"When I found out—" he continued—"when I found out your father was against me, something snapped, cruel and sharp, inside of me, and all week long I've done nothing—nothing at all but think and think. Day after day, I've sat and longed for you; night after night, I've stood outside of your window with my aching arms stretched high up to you. Haven't you heard me calling, calling, Flor'da? Haven't you *felt* me? I think my heart's stopped beating; I think my life's been standing still, just waiting—waiting for your lil' word to tell it to come on!"

The leaping torrent of his emotion seemed to suffocate him. It left him, gripping her frail hands tight and tighter, his breast heaving like the trough of the sea in a heavy swell.

Her pity still held her as fast as did his grasp. She would not change in her determination, but, hating what he had done, she could not but be sorry for what he had felt. Then, involuntarily, she for-

got what he had done: she could think of nothing, see nothing, but what she had done to him. She had not guessed that he loved her like this. She had not guessed that any man could so much care. The stillness, the loneliness of their dark trysting-place, momentarily settled closer upon her. She forgot all that should have frightened her, no longer felt the pain of his strong, lacing fingers; she remembered only that he loved her and that she—though she could no longer fully remember why—must tell him that he must love her no more.

"Poor Cal," she whispered between lips that scarcely opened. "Poor Cal," she repeated, her brown eyes misty with their unshed tears. "I'm sorry—I'm so—so sorry."

His own eyes widened.

"But it's all right now, isn't it, honey?" he gasped. "Honey, it's all right now?"

Slowly—wholly unable to find the words of denial—she shook her head.

Cal's long jaw dropped—then, with a click, closed tight. He bent her wrists with a brusque, agonizing twist, and so drew her—her hands folded under her throat, his own rough hands above them, her misty eyes looking up into the burning coals of his.

"Do you mean—mean—'No'?" he asked.

He spoke between his teeth, and his voice, issuing thus, was so low that, even in the silence of Beau-fain's Pond, she scarcely heard it. Between his red

lips, through the black mustache, his teeth reminded her of fangs.

She thought of that, but she did not tremble, did not draw back, did not attempt to struggle. In the growing darkness, in the stillness that could be felt, she was not afraid. Once she had thought herself possessed of a certain power over this man—had been so sure of it. Now, perhaps, she saw that that power had been a masquerading subservience—now, at least, she realized that any true power over him was gone. And yet what replaced it was not fear, but stupefaction—the relenting stupefaction of the bird just when the gaze of the serpent begins to achieve its effect. She could not fling her mental vision beyond this present instant, which seemed to be prolonging itself into the infinity of a dream. To his question, her sole reply was a bow of assent.

So long he waited then—still holding her with his crushing fingers—that she thought he would never speak again. But finally he was once more talking.

“I understand,” he said. “I know what you mean. I know. It’s your folks. But I don’t care for your folks. In about twenty minutes there’ll be a messenger here with money for me—money that I must go right away and pay. I can’t wait to argue with you.”

She felt that his hands were damp with sweat.

She tried in vain to think—tried to see facts as they were.

“Just one thing I want to know—right now,” his straining voice went on. “No matter about your folks, Flor'da: do you love me?”

As he spoke, his long breath scorched her face. She tried hard to answer. She tried to tell him that she had begun by pitying him, but that she now hated him. She tried also to hate him. But she could only look in wide-mouthed fascination at the fire which burned in his red eyes. The dog barked; neither the man nor the woman heard him.

“Flor'da,” urged Cal, “listen to me; I'll change, if that's what you want. I'll be different; I'll be whatever you want me to be. I swear I will, if only you'll love me. Flor'da, you do love me: tell me you do!”

He drew her slowly, irresistibly tighter. The great knuckles of his hands bored into her throat.

“Do you love me?” he repeated.

She tore her eyes away, but she could see nothing.

“Flor'da, do you—do you love me?”

In the dungeons of her soul she felt a tremor and a wrench. The Samson of the primordial was tugging at the very pillars of her conventional being, and the pillars resisted.

“No—no!” she gasped, with a heavy tongue. “No—I——” Her eyes met his again. What was it she saw there? Nay, more: what was this that,

of a sudden, she felt within herself? Her soul cried out in weary anguish: "I—don't know!"

Suddenly, at that word, he changed. He was speaking, but his voice was so low that, even though his lips were at her ear, she could scarcely catch his rapid flow of words—could scarcely catch and could not at all comprehend. What did he say of trifling? What did he say of being led on? What was this about his having her one way if he could not have her another?

His whole frame tightened, his eyes narrowed, his face became like ashes—and she knew him as she had known him in the parlor of her father's house, only a week before, when, throwing her aside, he ran forth to kill.

He held her in a vice. Did she cry? She could not tell. She knew that Teddy growled, barked, ran forward and was kicked away. She heard Cal say one thing more:

"You don't know if you love me? Well, *I* know, Flor'da!"

Then only she understood.

The dog howled.

"Let me—let me go!" gasped Florida.

And she tried again to cry aloud.

## CHAPTER IX

A DOG HOWLS

“For the day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening  
are stretched out.”

—THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH: 6:4.

## IX

SANBORN, when Cal had left him, had to wait but a few minutes for the return of the spaniel-eyed Billy Turner, bringing the New Englander's clothes, and not many minutes more until Billy, having secured the money from the station-master, started off with it toward Beaufain's Pond.

"Take care that cash doesn't run away with you," said Mark in a parting caution.

The mulatto grinned and shook his head.

"Takes more'n this here for to run away with me, Mars' Sanborn," he said.

Mark watched him trot up the road, then turn into the fields and disappear. He himself had decided to go some distance in the same general direction: he would return to "The Palmettos." He more than fancied that, to see Florida, Witherspoon would drop in there after Cal had met and paid him, and Mark was now enough concerned in Cal to want another conversation with Ollie upon that subject. Accordingly, he ordered his mare and, at a brisk canter, rode over to the Trévilles' place.

The Colonel and his wife were seated upon their porch when, having hitched his mare at the gate,



Sanborn came up the shell-path between the blooming rose-bushes.

"I'm back again," smiled Mark.

The Colonel rose and motioned Sanborn to a chair beside him. Mrs. Tréville looked up from some delicate embroidery over which she was bending, and smiled.

"We're glad to see you just as often as you care to honor us," said the master of the house.

Sanborn sat down opposite him at the head of the porch-steps. He had hesitated, in the circumstances, to ask for Florida on his previous visit, but he hesitated no longer: he had suddenly decided to take up with the Colonel a little matter of his own.

"Miss Tréville about?" he asked.

"I expect she soon will be," said the Colonel. "She just this minute stepped out for a lil' walk, but she said she'd be back before half an hour."

Mark thanked his stars, and inwardly wondered how, in order to have the Colonel's private ear and ask for the hand of Jane, he was ever to get rid of the Colonel's wife.

"I'm sorry," he politely prevaricated.

"Just wait 'round a lil' while, Mr. Sanborn," said Mrs. Tréville. "Flor'da will be back right soon, I'm sure. Won't you have a julep?"

Mark thanked her for the offer and accepted it: he did not want the drink, but he knew that Mrs. Tréville always took herself away when men took,

ever so slightly, to drinking. While she gave directions to the wide-faced maid, who immediately appeared, Sanborn began, with the Colonel, as far away as was possible from the subject that lay nearest to his heart.

"I sha'n't now have many more chances to come here," he said; "and, of course, I want to make the most of my few remaining opportunities."

The Colonel's rubicund countenance expressed a polite interest.

"I understood you to say your work was nearly completed," said he.

"Yes, the job's almost done—my part of it, at least. This last curve around New Meadows will be only a short matter, so far as I'm concerned, and then I'm to be moved on farther south."

The cameo-like face of Mrs. Tréville regarded him.

"And then," she asked, "somebody else will be put in charge here?"

"Somebody else, Mrs. Tréville."

She sighed.

"Well," she submitted, "I'm certain that the northern capitalists that are building this railroad will be sure to send us some one less agreeable."

It was intended, Mark knew, for a compliment.

He inclined his head to the lady, but he replied with modest deprecation.

"We're not such a bad lot, Mrs. Tréville; indeed

we're not. Perfection as I am, I assure you that, among us all, I am not solitary. I'm certain that whoever comes in my place can't help but love this countryside." He looked out over the flowering garden and then back at the old porch and the old people upon it. "Why," he declared, "it's like a pressed flower between the pages of an old romance."

She smiled at him.

"Mr. Sanborn," she said, "you are worthy of a better cause. You should have gone into politics."

"Politics? Oh," he laughed, "I've not much brains, but I hope I have too much for that!"

"Not for southern politics," corrected Mrs. Tréville.

Mark felt in her calm words the lurking prejudice that he was here to overcome.

"Mrs. Tréville," he declared, "I think the great trouble with this country is that we all keep on talking as if it were not one country, but several. We all speak of the West, the South, the North, just as we speak of France, England, of Germany. We create differences by assuming them." The negro maid had returned with the juleps on a tray. She was standing before Mark, but he scarcely noticed her. "There is no North," he magniloquently concluded, "and there is no South."

The black girl was gaping wide at this treasonable sentiment.

"Eliza," cautioned Mrs. Tréville, "how often must I speak to you? Your mouth is open."

"Yassam," stammered the servant: "I opened it."

Mrs. Tréville did not smile.

"Give Mr. Sanborn his julep," she commanded, and, when he had taken it, went on: "I leave you gentlemen to decide the question between you. Henry, I put our case entirely in your hands. Come, Eliza."

She left them with her old-world dignity, Mark fearing that he had somehow succeeded only in widening the chasm, the Colonel wearing, on his ruddy face, a curious mixture of amusement and vexation.

"Car'line is ve'y tender upon some subjects," he apologized, shaking his silver mane—"and," he added, as if unqualified apology would seem like a denial of his wife's sentiments, "she is quite right to be, Mr. Sanborn—quite right to be."

"I'm afraid that you both misunderstand me," said Mark. "I don't mean that I have any patience with the North as represented by a Fifth Avenue reception—a jostling of great names and great shames. What our rich men most enjoy about their wealth is the envy that it brings them from their neighbors, and just because of that I've no patience with them. But yet——"

"How about the way they made their money?"

the Colonel interjected. "Your rich northerners are all stock-gamblers, and gambling is gambling, whatever kind of cards you use for it."

"Well, we all gamble, if you come to that: our stock-speculators bet on the market and your farmers bet on the weather."

The Colonel slowly finished his julep.

"There's an essential difference, sir, between all sections of this country. America is not homogeneous, and consequently not stagnant."

"But it ought to be united."

"It *is* united."

Sanborn's blue eyes twinkled. He had resolved to go ahead.

"Couldn't we make it more so?" he asked.

Colonel Tréville's white eyebrows were raised in a betrayal of his bewilderment.

"How?" he inquired.

"Well," said Mark, "to begin in a small way, by a northerner like myself marrying a southerner like Mrs. MacDonald."

The Colonel frankly gaped.

"Do you mean that you're asking permission to pay your addresses to that young lady?"

It was a point of view that Mark should have counted upon and had not. He was a little ashamed of himself.

"I'm afraid that I'm a trifle late about asking permission, Colonel," he said. "I have a good po-

sition with the road and the certainty of advancement, and as for the young lady——”

But the young lady, not having left a distant portion of the big garden since she parted from Sanborn, and having later remained in hiding only because she guessed the motive for his return and wished to give it time for accomplishment, was now coming lightly up the path. Before Mark could finish his sentence, or the Colonel interrupt, Jane ascended the steps to speak for herself.

“Have you told him?” she asked, her violet eyes on Sanborn.

Mark nodded assent. The Colonel seemed tremendously grave.

“He has as much as told me, Jane,” said the latter, “that, seeing as he’s got you, he don’t mind my knowing about it.”

But the little widow flung her young arms around his neck, and, as the blue-black hair mixed with the silver, kissed the Colonel under his fierce mustache.

“Isn’t he a dear?” she demanded.

The Colonel drew away. He had tried to frown, but a smile intercepted the attempt.

“Meaning which?” he inquired.

“Both of you, of course, cousin Henry.” She gave Mark one hand, but kept the other upon the Colonel’s shoulder: “Both of you—but just now especially *you*, because, you see, you’ve given your consent.”

"Oh, have I?"

"Of course you have! Hasn't he, Mark?"

Sanborn, thus directly appealed to, said that he ventured to hope so.

Colonel Tréville really wanted to protest, and really tried to do it. But Jane was stopping his mouth, and Jane's kisses were of the sort that stop a mouth effectively. The Colonel surrendered.

"Ve'y well," he sighed—"but your Cousin Car'line is the real person to be consulted, and who is to speak to her?"

"You will, cousin Henry, of course."

"She'll not like it, you know. With all due deference to Mr. Sanborn——"

"To Mark," corrected Jane.

"Ve'y well: to Mark, then—with all due deference to Mark she will be inclined to stand by her principles."

"Not if you don't, cousin," Jane insisted: "you could persuade anybody."

"Barring you two," said Colonel Tréville.

It took some argument to convince him, but he was won at last—just in time, indeed, to conclude the matter before the lithe figure of Ollie Wither-  
spoon came into view.

"Where's Miss Flor'da?" the newcomer inquired, his fine boyish face alert with expectation.

"She's gone for a lil' walk," said the Colonel.

"I didn't meet her."



"She went by the fields."

"Did she take Teddy with her?"

"I don't know, Ollie; I think so. Why do you ask?"

"As I came near here I thought I heard a dog." His eyes grew darker. "I hope she didn't intend to go far."

The Colonel smiled at this anxiety prompted by an emotion that he was now in fit mood to detect.

"Not ve'y far, I reckon," he answered soothingly. "She said she had a lil' headache and would be back before half an hour."

Mark looked carelessly at his watch.

"But she left before I came, Colonel," he said, "and I've been here for forty minutes."

"Oh"—the Colonel wagged his silver head—"she'll be along presently."

They sat for a time at the head of the porch-stairs, Witherspoon opposite the Colonel in the chair that Sanborn had resigned, Mark and Jane on the top step at the feet of their companions. There was no chance for Sanborn to speak to Ollie about Cal; but the New Englander's heart was now too full of other affairs to worry over that. He wanted to tell his happiness to Witherspoon, to the whole world; but he decided to follow, at last, the lead of Jane and the Colonel. For the rest, he referred to Cal only once, and then he did so with the guilty feeling that he was mentioning a tabooed subject.



"Have you seen Mr. Ridgeley?" he asked of Witherspoon.

Ollie showed his surprise.

"Recently?"

"This evening."

"No," said Witherspoon, and then he added: "Why?"

"Because," Mark answered, "I rather thought he'd be wanting to see you. It is of no consequence."

Neither Jane nor the Colonel expressed any interest in this dialogue.

"Oh," said Witherspoon with amusing comprehension and a consequently increasing desire to close the subject, "you're referring to that lil' matter we spoke of? He will sure look me up some time this evening."

Mark wondered. If Cal had not gone to Beau-fain's Pond to meet Witherspoon, who was it that he was to meet? Well, what matter? Jane was here, and Jane meant joy, and joy is the enemy of all speculation. In the hush of the balmy evening, the voices of the four people were instinctively lowered; but they talked of trivial things.

Before them, in the perfumed twilight, stretched the garden, red and fragrant with roses, green and quiet with its motionless, torrid palmettos. Overhead, darkness, creeping slowly upward from the east, was drawing its cloak across the sky and hang-



*Albert Matzke*

"AT LEAST, COLONEL, THOUGH I SAY THAT OURS IS ONE COUNTRY, I HAVE LEARNED TO LOVE THIS PART BEST," SAID MARK



ing, here and there, the pale first lanterns of the night. Far away, toward Jane's home, a church-bell rang, briefly, the final call to the Easter Even service—rang and dropped, of a sudden, into the echoless silence. Ahead of them, beyond the garden-wall, and across the line of meadows, the dull crimson afterglow hung, like a streak of blood, above the silhouettes of dense woodland about the foot of Beau-fain's Pond.

"At least," said Mark, speaking gently—"at least, Colonel, though I say that ours is one country, I have learned to love this part of it."

Jane shrugged.

"What do you like best about it?" she asked.

"Next to its people," Mark answered, "I like this."

He pushed out his free arm—for his other hand was covertly clasping Jane's—and, sweeping the peaceful picture before them, paused as if pointing directly to the bloody afterglow.

Witherspoon leaped to his feet.

"What was that?" he asked hoarsely.

They looked at him in amazement. He stood erect now, his lithe body tense, his young face gravely eager, his whole attitude that of a man striving to catch a distant sound.

"What's that?" he repeated.

Mark and the Colonel were both at once beside him.

"What's what?" demanded the former.

"Something I—I am certain I heard a cry."

"Ollie," said the Colonel, "what's the matter with you? You're nervous this evening. You better leave these two and come in with me and have a lil'——"

"No——" Witherspoon was still tense.

"But *we* heard nothing," said Sanborn.

"*I* did."

"How could you when *we*——"

"Hush!" Witherspoon raised his hand imperatively. "There it is again!"

They leaned forward, their eyes reaching out across the quiet rolling meadows, their senses a-tip-toe.

Then, very faintly—from nowhere, from somewhere—there rose the dim murmur of what, in the distance, must have been a cry—a wild, heart-breaking, blood-curdling cry—a woman's cry—the cry of a woman in mortal agony and more than mortal fear.

"My God!" whispered the Colonel, and went suddenly white.

They stood like persons in a tableau.

"Flor'da!" cried Witherspoon.

"Colonel," said the matter-of-fact Sanborn, "where did Miss Tréville say she was going?"

"I don' know. I——"

"Did you see which way she turned?"

The old man trembled.

"I—I think I noticed she was walking toward Beaufain's Pond."

"Mark!" gasped Jane.

Out in the woods a dog howled.

"That's it!" Witherspoon shouted, and—just as he saw the Colonel totter and sink into a chair—ran down the steps.

"I'm coming!" said Mark.

"And so am I," gasped Colonel Tréville.

But Sanborn assumed command. He turned to his host, and spoke rapidly, yet with a calm authority: "No," he said; "somebody—some man must stay, and we can go faster, Colonel. Besides, it may be nothing. Get Jane inside, if you can: it's better. Go, Jane. Say nothing to Mrs. Tréville. We'll be back directly."

He, too, turned and ran; he ran pell-mell after Witherspoon. In the growing twilight he tripped on his mad way to the gate, but he picked himself up and hurried forward, his hands bleeding. Once outside, he heard the clatter of hoofs, paused an instant and then dashed ahead.

But Ollie had been before him. The younger man had remembered Mark's mare; he had run to the road, wrenched free the animal's hitching-strap, vaulted into the saddle and, digging his heels into the mare's flanks, had headed her, at a break-neck gallop, straight across the darkened meadows.

He did not look for anything on the way. He did not see a man's shadow that sank into the high, salt grasses as he approached it and lay there until he thundered by, the horse leaping and pitching over the broken, unfamiliar ground, each instant a separate threat to limb or life. Florida was not, he was sure, in the meadows; the cry had come from beyond them. Besides, the meadows were safe, but in the woods, on the other side, lay the silent, greedy waters of Beaufain's Pond.

At the entrance of the woods, the mare tripped, lurched and pitched forward on her knees. She struggled.

Witherspoon jumped from the saddle. Without another glance at his disabled mount, he plunged into the undergrowth. It was almost pitch dark here; it was heavy with poisonous odors.

"Flor'da!" he called, beating his way toward where he knew the pond to be.

His voice seemed to burst from his dry throat and shatter that ominous silence like the report of a rifle. The trees took it up and echoed it until the noise became deafening.

"Flor'da! Flor'da!"

He had, in spite of himself, to stop and wait for the echoes to die away.

The darkness vibrated from his cry, but seemed a palpable thing that resisted him, that held him back. There was no answer to his cry.

"Flor'da!" he shrieked and fought forward.

He was mad. He went direct, but by instinct only.

"Flor'da! Flor'da! Flor'da!"

The darkness deepened, but he knew that he must now be somewhere near the pond. He slipped upon the surface of a slowly sloping rock. His knee touched something. He struck a match. His hand shook so that the feeble light was at once extinguished. . . .

He had found her whom he sought.





## CHAPTER X

A MAN LIES

"And the Lord sent Nathan unto David."

—THE SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL.

## X

FOR every one of the several persons immediately concerned in the happenings of that Easter Eve, the events which followed hard upon the finding of Florida on the sloping rock at the foot of Beaufain's Pond assumed both the hue and the texture of delirium. Five minutes were now a second, and the next second lengthened itself to an hour. Familiar ground became strange, objects were distorted, outlines blurred. Things said without reason were reasonable, and the apropos was without connection. Figures arose out of nothingness and melted again into nothingness. The improbable had changed place with the matter-of-course, and not one of the actors in the tragedy could have given any clear account of his own part in it.

Sanborn, plunging afoot across the meadows, could not have told for certain whether he saw somebody rise from the grass and run into the darkness before he heard Witherspoon's cry or after it. He could not honestly have told whether he, in fact, saw any such thing. He knew, in looking backward, that he must have been for at least ten min-

utes laboring in his pursuit of Ollie, fighting through the underbrush, beating back the dark, but he knew also that he seemed to be at one moment entering the meadow and at the next kneeling beside Witherspoon.

Witherspoon, on his part, seemed to himself to have been for hours beside the barely breathing body of the girl. He seemed to have lifted it in his arms as if it had no weight at all. And he seemed to have walked for miles, instead of a few rods, through the dense underbrush, before he fell with his burden at the very feet, as it appeared, of Mark Sanborn.

What the two men then said to each other—whether any questions were asked, and whether any, if asked, were answered—neither ever at all recalled. Sanborn felt that he was shouting, over and over, one query; but Witherspoon found it impossible to hear the low whisper in which Sanborn spoke. Ollie was insanely aware of repeating, again and again, a horrible phrase—repeating it monotonously, meaninglessly—in a subconscious effort to make both of them understand the truth; and yet Mark was unable to catch, or at least to comprehend, a syllable.

Somehow, some way, in the darkness—a darkness full of heavy breaths and distant, dancing lights—Florida Tréville was carried—though whether by one or both neither ever remembered—across the heaving meadows. Somehow, some way, the dis-

tant lights drew nearer. Somehow, some way, the dancing ceased, and human beings appeared behind and about the lights—a half-dozen servants that seemed to be a score—and the burden was lifted into the suddenly present garden.

There was a sound of many voices. There was a sound of running footsteps. There was low sobbing and one loud, piercing wail. And then, for a flashing instant, full in the lantern's light, looking down upon his daughter, the face of Colonel Tréville, never to be forgotten.

Mark came to his senses as soon as some voice asked for a doctor.

"I'll go," he said. "Where's my horse?" And his voice, in his own ears, was the voice of a stranger.

"Your horse is daid, Mars' Sanborn"—it was a servant speaking—"but here's the Colonel's roan all ready."

Mark leaped into the saddle. As he did so, Witherspoon clutched desperately at the girths.

"Get off!" he mumbled. "Get off, I tell you! I'm going!"

Sanborn had to shove the man away from him by main force. Then the roan went clattering down the road.

Mark was riding to Dr. Pickens's house on the outskirts of the town, but suddenly he was aware that, in the truest sense, he was not riding alone.

Something kept him company, sat before him in the saddle—something that he could in no wise unhorse. It was only a fear, only a thought, but it was more terrible than any human enemy: Cal had said that he was going to Beaufain's Pond; Witherspoon did not go there to meet Cal—and it was at Beaufain's Pond that Florida was found. Florida, with whom Witherspoon, Sanborn's friend, was in love; Ridgeley, who was the brother of the girl that he, Mark, was soon to marry: here was a horror that he could not lose, yet must not mention, a tragedy in which his only part must be to summon a physician and then—until Florida could speak, if she ever could speak, or if, being able, she ever chose to speak—hold his tongue.

Meanwhile, Ollie Witherspoon, having reeled back into the road at Sanborn's rebuff, looked about him in helpless uncertainty. Something had happened—he scarcely knew what. Something he must do—but what he scarcely considered. With the automatic movements of a man whose mind, after a sudden stop, begins to work precisely at the point at which it had encountered the obstacle to its progress, he strode away from the group of people about the garden-gate and began to retrace his course across the dark meadow-land.

He knew now what it was that he must do. Florida was in the house with the women—he remembered that; the Colonel, some one said, had

collapsed—that also he remembered. Sanborn, he next recalled, had gone for a physician. But nobody had yet thought to look for the criminal.

With the realization of that fact, he became quickly, perfectly alert. A great rage boiled within him—a blind, mad, blood-hungry rage. What no one had yet thought of doing, he would do, and when he had found the thing that destroyed, he would destroy it.

He was now at the center of the field. All about him the darkness was complete; the moon had not yet risen, and it was a night of few stars. Witherspoon resolved to return to the house for a revolver—he rarely went armed—and for a lantern. The latter he need not light until he reached the foot of the pond, but there he would require it to discover traces of him that had escaped; the former he would want when the capture was effected.

He stumbled back toward the house, through the ruts and hillocks of the farm-land, but the lights at "The Palmettos" were few, and he veered a little from his direct course. As he drew near to the road, perhaps fifty yards above the garden, he noticed, indistinct against the obscurity, a wavering bulk of blacker blackness, which he took to be a man.

Witherspoon sprang instantly into a run. The man seemed then to hear him, for the figure turned and made an awkward, uncertain movement. But



Ollie bounded forward and flung out his clawing hands. His fingers touched upon a corduroy sleeve, and closed.

"Who are you?" he cried—and then found himself peering into the face of Calhoun Ridgeley.

In the night only the features could be detected. Any study of the expression was impossible.

Ridgeley broke roughly away.

"Take your hands off of me!" he commanded.

At once Witherspoon obeyed.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I didn't recognize you. My God, Cal, isn't this awful?"

To him it seemed that the whole world must know that which had happened. Upon this impulse he spoke and upon it received Ridgeley's reply.

Cal's voice had lost its accustomed monotone. He put upon Witherspoon's shoulder a hand that shook like a sick man's, and when he spoke it was in a tone that rose and fell as if Ridgeley could in no way guide its timbre.

"Is she daid?" he asked. "She can't be daid!"

"I don't know. No, she's not daid."

"Is she——" The man seemed to be wetting his dry lips. "Is she conscious?"

"She wasn't when we found her."

"But—will—but is she going to die?"

"How do I know? The doctor hasn't come 'round yet. Sanborn's gone for him."

Ridgeley's hold loosened. He seemed almost to

totter against the fence. Witherspoon heard the rails creak under the weight; he heard the man's heavy, irregular breathing. A gleam of reason came to him. •

"Cal," he said, "where were you?"

"Who?—Me?—When?" The monosyllabic questions rattled out like shot from a suddenly slit pouch.

"Yes, you—when this happened?" Witherspoon elaborated.

In the darkness Ridgeley's heavy breathing was still audible—broken, almost sobbing.

"Did Sanborn say where I was?" he asked.

"Sanborn?"—Witherspoon was at a loss to understand.

"Yes—he knew. I had to see a man right near here." He was speaking almost glibly now. "I had to come right this way."

"Then you must have been near when—when it happened?"

"Yes—I don't know. I had to—— Where did it happen?"

Intent only on gathering evidence to fit what he assumed as the matter-of-course fact, his mind weighing only one supposition, his heart crying out for action, Ollie seized fast upon the giant and shook him. Distraught Witherspoon was, unable to look at what had happened save from one point of view, beaten by the event into a being with only

a single thought and a single purpose: not until time had furnished its perspective would he—could he—see this night in its true bearings; but now, at once, he could act. Immature he may still have been, but nobody would have called him boyish now.

“Come to your senses!” he cried. “Are you still drunk? Help me out! Tell me what I must know! You say you were near Beaufain’s Pond. Didn’t you hear anything? My God, *man—talk!*”

The answer was slow in coming. It seemed to Witherspoon that Ridgeley had borne the blow worse than any of them that had to bear it. But at last Cal spoke:

“No, I didn’t hear anything,” he said.

“Yet you say you were somewhere near there. Try to think! Try to remember!” Witherspoon was himself going mad again in his endeavor to find some clue.

“I can’t think.” In the darkness, Ollie could just make out that the speaker was passing his heavy hand across his eyes. “How *can* I think—*right now?*”

“But you must have heard *something*, man!” insisted Witherspoon. “How near were you to the foot of the pond?”

“Sanborn can tell you. I’d just left there. Yes, I must just have left there before—before she came by.”

“And you say you didn’t hear anything? Why,

we heard—we heard her crying—and we were away over on the porch here at 'The Palmettos.' ”

“I didn't hear a thing.”

“Were you drunk?”

Ridgeley's giant frame straightened.

“Course I wasn't drunk,” he said, but he was still trembling like a fever-patient. “I know just where I've been and what I've done.”

“Oh, what do I care where you've been or what you've been doing, if you can't help us out in this? Get your wits together, Cal! What's wrong with you? Of the two of us, it always used to be you that was the man of action. I tell you——”

He stopped abruptly, and, through the darkness, tried to force his glance into Ridgeley's eyes. Ridgeley drew back.

“What's wrong now?” he gasped.

“Cal,” said Witherspoon, “you know who it was did this!”

“I don't! I don't know!” The man's voice fell to a tense whisper of denial. “How should I know?”

“Yes, you do know! How *shouldn't* you? You were too close not to hear something, and your ve'y saying you didn't hear shows me you know more'n you'll tell.”

Cal Ridgeley flung out his arms and shoved Witherspoon aside.

“Lemme by!” he said.

But Witherspoon caught the shoving arm and hung fast to it.

"You know!" he repeated.

"Lemme by! You're crazy! Lemme by, or I'll hurt you, Ollie—I surely will."

Witherspoon, with a quick twist, released the giant's sleeve and grasped his collar.

"It's my right, I tell you—it's mine because I mean to take it. You sha'n't save him for yourself to kill: I'm going to kill him—I am! Tell me now. You saw him."—He launched the question that made clear his single certainty, the one thing that he had, of course, accepted as unnecessary of proof: the color of the criminal. "Cal, what nigger was it?" he demanded.

A sigh broke from Ridgeley's lips and then a great gasp: it was as if he passed from a sudden relief to a terror equally sudden and almost equally great.

"How do you know I saw him?" he countered.

"You've as much as admitted it. You were nearly on the spot. Why, Cal, if this had happened in the North, or somewhere where there aren't any niggers, the circumstances'd be 'most enough to make people that didn't know you think you did it yourself!"

What he was saying Witherspoon, in the frenzy of his grief, scarcely knew, but to his hearer the words must have been heavy with the very threat

that Cal doubtless at first suspected underlay all of Ollie's questions.

"Who was it?" Witherspoon insisted.

Ridgeley tried to speak, but it was evident that he could find no word to say. Was he wondering if Witherspoon could see his face? Was he wondering whether, a moment since, he had heard aright?

"Tell me that nigger's name!" cried Witherspoon.

A "nigger"! Then he had heard rightly! A coward never asks for proofs of his fear: Ridgeley saw a light; any less moved observer than Ollie would have said that the man leaped for it.

"The only nigger I saw," he stammered—"the only one was——"

He stopped, but Witherspoon was shaking at his collar.

"I was sure of it!" cried Ollie. "You knew all along who did this, and you wouldn't tell me because you wanted to kill him yourself!"

"I don't—I don't know. I don't want to kill anybody. I only saw one nigger."

"Well, who was it?"

"He—it wouldn't be like him to——"

"It had to be that nigger, whoever he was. Who was he?"

There was a long pause. Through the darkness, the two white men's eyes sought each other's.

Then, as if in mortal fear, Calhoun-Ridgeley whispered:

"It was Billy Turner."

Witherspoon's hold loosened. His hands dropped to his sides, impotent. Billy Turner? The soft-eyed, devoted mulatto—the man that was to marry Jane MacDonald's maid Sally, the man that had been the body-servant of Florida Tréville's twin brother, the man that Florida had herself taught to read!

"It couldn't be," gasped Witherspoon. "It couldn't be!"

"That's what I told you."

"Are you sure it was Billy?"

"I'm sure it was Billy I saw; but I tell you——"

"Where did you see him?"

"I don't know."

"Where did you see him?"

"At the aide of the woods. He was bringing me some money from Sanborn."

"Good God!" gasped Witherspoon.

He turned on his heel and started away.

This time, however, it was Ridgeley that prevented departure. He strode after Ollie and laid his rough hold upon him.

"What you going to do?" he demanded.

Witherspoon's voice was harsh. "What do you reckon I'm going to do?"

"Billy Turner?"



"Who else?"

"But, Ollie, you don't know—you're not certain—you haven't any real proof!"

Again, any one less moved than Witherspoon would have noted the new element in Cal's behavior. But Ollie was now a man of one idea:

"What more could I have? He was there—right there. You saw him."

"I know, Ollie; but I only saw him going toward the woods."

"You said you saw him at the aidge of it."

Ridgeley's body was convulsed as by an inward struggle.

"I might 'a' been mistaken. Perhaps I was even mistaken in the man."

"You said he was bringing you something. How could you be mistaken?"

"I know, Ollie; but how can we be——"

"And you talk this way—when it was you who shot Jim Jackson?"

Ridgeley's answer was sudden.

"Yes, that's just it, Ollie. You see——"

"I don't see. Then there was a mistake."

"But here——"

"Here there's no room for doubt, I tell you. No, I know what you want. Cal, don't think you're going to have this man for your own gun. He's mine!"

"Ollie! Ollie!"—But even to Witherspoon it



was clear now that Ridgeley could form no further plea. The giant could only hang fast to Wither-  
spoon and repeat, over and over, his rival's name.

Ollie, in a white heat, shook himself loose. He would employ an insinuation in the truth of which he could not, of course, believe, but in the efficacy of which he had faith.

"Cal," he cried, "whoever did this thing has got to die. There were only you two near that place at that time. If Billy Turner didn't do this thing, *who did?*"

Ridgeley took him at his word. The blood-curse of Cal's heritage had ended by enslaving him to the fear of death. Always—by the reiterated record of his forefathers' lives; by the example and conversation of his own father; by his boyhood training and his lifelong environment—he had been made to regard human life as something that could be taken cheaply and that must be sold dear. To murder—with the pistol of the duelist, with the rope of the lyncher, with the revolver of the assassin—was to inflict the severest evil, and so to be murdered was to suffer the greatest disaster. That was the secret of his swash-buckling manner; it was the legacy of his ancestors, the heirloom handed down from the fire-eaters and bravos whose name he bore. They had inflicted, he must bear. To kill—that was the perfect reprisal; to be killed—that, then, must be the ultimate torment.

It is not only our every act, but our every changing thought that goes to the making of character, day by day, moment by moment. To this end Cal had been shaped from the beginning. For all crimes against himself he had believed that death was the worst punishment, and so, by a natural process, he had come to dread his own death as the greatest possible ill that could befall him.

His mouth opened to reply; then closed in silence.

Witherspoon was still a man possessed. He saw only the crime that had been done. His latest words were merely a means of silencing Cal. He accepted as a patent certainty the assumption that a negro was guilty. His task had been simply to find what negro had been nearest to the foot of Beaufain's Pond at the time of the crime's occurrence. That task was now completed, and, for Witherspoon, the deduction was inevitable.

With no other word, with no further protest from Ridgeley, Ollie turned away and hurried toward the Tréville house. He walked with huge strides, with heels that dug deep into the mold and with hands that were clenched tight.

At his side, as if he were walking to the scaffold, walked Ridgeley. Only the man's huge outline silhouetted itself against the shadowy background of the night, only his shambling tread made itself heard. But had the sun shone now, had his face been seen by his companion, even Witherspoon would have

killed him, or been killed, before ever the pair of them reached the garden-gate.

About that gate—drawn by the spread of news that travels so swiftly and so mysteriously in such communities—a group of men had collected. Some of them carried lanterns, and in the light of these were discernible many of the company that, a week before, had lounged in the tavern's bar-room on the night when Jim Jackson was shot.

They fell back as the two men approached them, both Witherspoon and Ridgeley thus remaining in the darkness. One man, however—a man that did not carry a light—came near them, touching his hat. He spoke in the stilted manner that the uneducated consider among the first demands of tragedy.

"Have you formed any conjecture as to what black devil done this deed, Mr. With'spoon?" he asked.

Ollie, scarcely daring to trust his voice, nodded.

"Who was it, sir?"

"Mr. Ridgeley was not far from the pond at the time. He saw a nigger at the aidge of the woods."

"That's him, certain sure! Who was it, sir? Who was it?"

Ollie inclined his head again, this time toward Cal.

"Ask Mr. Ridgeley," he said.

The other men drew nearer, their faces white and dour in the unsteady lights. Ridgeley turned away, but Witherspoon put out a restraining hand. He

noticed that Cal was still trembling, but he thought that the trembling was that of anger at the thwarting of a personal revenge.

"Tell them," Witherspoon commanded.

"I won't," said Cal.

"You must." And then, as Ridgeley, with sullenly hanging head, remained silent, Witherspoon continued: "Mr. Ridgeley happened to be almost on the ve'y spot. He is the only witness. Cal, was it Billy Turner?"

Cal heard, but two other sentences were ringing in his ears—a statement and a question: "The circumstances'd be enough to make people think *you* did it yourself! . . . If Billy Turner didn't do it, who did?"

The faint rays of one of the posse's lanterns streaked, for a moment, Ridgeley's ashen face. He looked away; he looked at the dark sky; silently his lips moved. It might have seemed to the onlookers almost as if those lips were praying.

"Was it Billy Turner?" Witherspoon repeated.

Ridgeley made one of his heavy gestures: perhaps, this time, it was a gesture of despair.

"Yes," he whispered.



## CHAPTER XI

### A WOMAN'S SILENCE

"Thye sea of sorrow and tempestuous griefe,  
Wherein my feeble barke is tossed long,  
Far from the hoped haven of reliefe,  
Why doe thy cruel billowes beat so strong,  
And thy moyst mountaines each on others throng,  
Threatening to swallow up my fearfull lyfe?"

—SPENSER: "Fairie Queene."

## XI

ALL that night sleep did not enter the broad doorways of the Tréville house. Outside, the crowd on the turnpike speedily faded away; the road was deserted; empty darkness brooded over the garden, enveloped the rolling meadows beyond and, until the coming of a sharp Spring storm, rested upon the drooping branches of the black trees above the silence of the dark waters of Beaufain's Pond. But inside the house a feverish life shot ever restlessly to and fro. Lights moved from room to room; voices, hushed, but highstrung, spoke in the old corridors, beside closed doors, and light footsteps hurried upstairs and down.

Soon after Sanborn had gone for him, the brusque little doctor arrived from the city, his lips set firmly, a leathern medicine-case under his arm. He was met at the door by the frightened servant that had been set to watch for him and thus, relieved of the necessity of using the big brass knocker that had banged under the fists of generations of Trévilles and their friends, was at once ushered to the bedroom where Florida lay.

Meanwhile, below, in that room in which Florida



had displayed to Mark the pistols that were for her the symbol of the curse which lay on Calhoun Ridgely, Colonel Tréville was sitting alone. They had helped him, tottering, there after his collapse upon the confirmation of his fears in regard to his daughter; but, once across the threshold, he had scouted their dread of an apoplectic seizure, waved them imperatively from his presence, bidden them go where they were more needed—ordering that reports be brought to him every quarter-of-an-hour—and had then chosen for his night-long vigil the stiffest and most uncompromising of all the room's colonial chairs.

“Sh-sh-should I br-bring a lil' light, sir?” stuttered Eliza, looking in a few minutes later.

“Yes, Eliza; you may bring a light—and the decanter of Bourbon.”

The Colonel spoke in a voice that was low and controlled, but that was, as even the scared maid noted, only an echo of the voice that had, an hour earlier, been his.

“Yassir. All right, sir.”

“And Eliza?”

“Yassir.”

“Miss Flor'da, is she—is she conscious now?”

“Only kind of conscious, Mars' Tréville. Miss Jane, she says Miss Flor'da is hysterical like.”

“Mrs. Tréville, Eliza?”

“She done fainted at first, Mars' Tréville—just

naturally drapped down on the floor—but she's some better now and up there, 'tending to Miss Flor'da along with Miss Jane."

"You will tell them that I am here if they need me. Tell them that I am to be sent for at once if Miss Flor'da grows—worse. Tell them to be sure not to excite my daughter by any questions—*by any questions at all*. But tell them that I am to be notified just as soon as Miss Flor'da is calmer. Can you remember all that?"

"Yassir, Mars' Tréville."

The servant went out, returned, trembling, with a lamp and fetched the whiskey. The Colonel made her repeat the instructions that he had given her and then sent her again away.

The lamp, upon the Chippendale table, shed its low soft rays over the quiet, formal room. The brass and iron gleamed from the cold fireplace; from between the black patches that marked the bow-window rose the old-fashioned desk in which was kept the pistol-case that had belonged to Cal Ridgeley's father, and from the walls, in serene severity, gazed down the fading faces of the old Trévilles of other times, with no message of encouragement or counsel for this, their last son, who now sat beneath them in his trouble, as erect, and to all appearances as severe and uncompromising, as they.

But the Colonel's face was changed. His splendid mane still shone with silver, his head was still

carried at an angle of defiance, but his eyes, dim though hard, looked rather back into the days of these ancestors than forward into the night that encompassed him. The flush had fled from his cheeks, leaving them lined and waxen. They were sunken, and his hands, grasping the dark mahogany arms of his chair, seemed whiter and thinner. He had grown much older; he was very old.

From the decanter at his elbow, he poured for himself a little liquor into a glass cut with the Tréville arms. He poured steadily; then, with the glass half way to his open lips, he paused and remained, arrested in the midst of action, for a long time motionless. When he did move, it was, without glancing at it, to replace the dram upon the table, appearing to think, if he thought at all about it, that he had taken the drink. During all the time that he remained at his vigil, he drank nothing.

Slowly the night wore on. Every fifteen minutes Eliza entered with her report from the sick-room, and every time she brought the same message that she had at first brought. The patient passed from a faint to inarticulate hysteria and back again into a faint.

When the physician had returned below-stairs, immediately after his visit to the patient, the Colonel ordered him shown into the room where he waited. As the fat little doctor entered, in obedience to these orders, his mouth tightened at sight of his host.

"Don't you think you had better let me give *you* a lil' something?" he inquired.

He had a competent face—the iron-gray face of a man of fifty, with the expression of a physician that has fought disease and lost no oftener than he has won.

The Colonel had risen, with all his accustomed formality of welcome.

"I thank you," he said; "but I am quite well, Doctor Pickens—quite well, indeed, sir. I trust that you are the same?"

The doctor nodded.

"Instead of my taking your medicine, may I offer you a lil' of my whiskey?" The Colonel extended his hand toward the decanter.

"Thank you, no," said Doctor Pickens, and, drawing a chair opposite to that of his host, sat down.

The necessary formalities were over. Instantly both men dropped the masks of social etiquette. The doctor did so immediately to assume the even more imperturbable mask of another sort—that professional mask of omniscience which is always worn with the bedside manner.

But the Colonel had nothing to fall back upon. He was merely an old man in trouble. His lip trembled.

"Doctor—" he said—"my lil' girl——?"

"She will recover," said the physician.

For half an hour they talked. The father poured

forth his questions; he was now broken by his sorrow and again shaking with anger at the cause of it—an impotent anger, terrible to witness. The physician met the sorrow with such store of comfort as his science provided; the anger he sought to soothe as man to man. Whatever danger there was to the patient, he said, lay in the nervous shock that she had received—he had given her a lightly-quieting draught and, in an hour, would give her another and stronger dose, if necessary, to produce sleep. She had an excellent constitution—excellent. Of course, this shock—but her nerves were strong; she might even be able to be about the house to-morrow. As for the moral wrong that had been done—the doctor spoke now as a friend of the family and as the physician that had brought Florida into the world—well, the wrong was one that no amount of vengeance could undo. The most that could be hoped was from the ordinary course of established law.

“Law?” The Colonel’s poor eyes gleamed again. “Did you say law, sir? Do you suppose for one instant that I would consider allowing the worth of my daughter’s honor to become a subject for valuation by a court of law?”

“But, Colonel, you surely don’t mean that you consider the law, in which all that you stand for is founded——”

Colonel Tréville rose; he rested only the tips of his trembling fingers on the arm of his chair.

"Sir," said he, "I have always had the highest respect for the law. Many of my ancestors, as you well know, have presided in the courts of this state—and adorned them, sir; adorned them. In my own youth I myself studied for the profession of the law and was admitted to the bar, though I never practised. But I have been brought this night into a position which I never before fully appreciated—and which, God knows, I had no reason ever to appreciate—and when, from this position, I look at the law, and remember how its proudest boast is that it provides to all people a remedy for every wrong, I see that the law, sir, is a hollow pretense, sir, and a hollow lie!"

He sank back in his chair, his cheeks more waxen than ever, his chest rising and falling almost ster-torously.

Dr. Pickens's face darkened.

"I hope," he said, "that you don't mean to appeal from the statute law to that of Judge Lynch."

Broken as he was, Colonel Tréville was capable of a withering glance, and that he now spared for his family physician.

"Had I meant to do that, sir," he grimly declared, "I would never have stopped to reenter the house of my fathers this evening. No, Doctor, I see no choice between making my daughter the subject of discussion for a parcel of lawyers and a court-room full of vulgar curiosity-seekers on the one

hand, and of making her the cause of a murder by a mob of low-down cut-throats on the other. There are some things that a gentleman simply has to bear, particularly a southern gentleman—if he's unfortunate enough to have them come to him—and this, sir, is one of them."

The doctor, still the family-friend, nodded, but not wholly in agreement.

"Nevertheless, on the side of the law," he said, "you have a duty to the community. You can't afford to let such criminals remain at large, Colonel Tréville."

"Nor do I mean to permit anything of the kind, sir. I mean to learn from my daughter the name of this black man. Then I mean to go to my cousin, the District Attorney. And lastly, I mean that I shall have my cousin run down this nigger wherever he may be in hiding and arrest him on any charge in the world, excepting the right charge—and send him to jail on that charge for just as long as I can have him kept there."

In spite of the pathos of the situation, Dr. Pickens could scarcely repress a smile.

"I see," he said softly.

The Colonel rose.

"You will remain with us to-night?" he courteously inquired. "The proper preparations have been made for you?"

"I think that I had better stay here for some



hours. I don't anticipate the slightest danger, but, knowing you-all as I do——"

"Quite so, sir; quite so. I thank you." The Colonel waved his unsteady hand about the room. "Pray, make yourself thoroughly at home, sir. There is the whiskey; this bell-rope will summon a servant. I, for my own part, shall be back shortly; but, if you think the patient is not in too hysterical a condition, I should like to see—my daughter."

There lay, under the formality of the Colonel's manner, a wistfulness that touched Pickens.

"Well," he said, "perhaps it is better that she should see you at once. Otherwise, she might come to look forward to it in such a way as to end by dreading it. But be gentle with her, Colonel—ve'y gentle."

"Gentle?"—Colonel Tréville drew himself erect. "Of course I shall be gentle. What do you mean to imply, sir?"

"Nothing—nothing at all. Only she must not be made to talk too much, Colonel. She is still in a highly nervous state, you see; and if she should have taken any distraught fancy for reticence——"

The Colonel's manner showed that he considered this a time to be specific:

"Do yo' mean that Miss Tréville is refusing to give the name of the nigger that attacked her?"

The old eyes flashed once more as the Colonel put this question. Dr. Pickens looked away.



"There was something said," he replied, "by Mrs. MacDonald that made me think it might be possible, Colonel."

"Oh, by Jane MacDonald! Of course she wouldn't talk to a mere cousin. Wait till she sees her old father."

He left the room and passed into the dimly-lighted hall. As, however, his wrinkled white hand, heavily veined, rested on the slim newel-post, he paused. He had heard a soft scratching at the closed front-door. The scratching was repeated. It was followed by a low whine. Colonel Tréville gently opened the door.

Crouching on the step was the form of Florida's bull-terrier, Teddy.

"Poor boy!" whispered the Colonel. "Come here, lad."

The dog rose, staggered toward him and then crumpled down at his feet.

Colonel Tréville lighted a match and examined the animal. Then he summoned Eliza.

"Ask Doctor Pickens if he has some chloroform," he said. "If the doctor has some, tell him I should be obliged to him if he would put this poor beast out of his misery. I believe the lil' fellow's got a broken leg, and his haid's been laid open by a kick."

The Colonel proceeded, on tiptoe, up the stairs. At their head he met Jane, her hand still upon the knob of a door that she was in the act of closing—

the door to Florida's room. The Colonel's pause asked his question for him.

"She's quieter now," said Jane.

"And your cousin Ca'oline?"

"Inside."

"Ask her to come out. It will be easier for Flor'da to see me alone."

Jane opened the door, thrust in her head and signaled to some one within. A moment later Mrs. Tréville stepped out.

The Colonel did not stop to offer any vain consolation. He knew that effort in that direction would unarm them both. He merely pressed his wife's hand, and, in silence, slipped into the room and drew the door fast behind him.

It was a large room and high-ceilinged, like all the others in that old house, but, unlike the others, this one had about it the little touches of girlish prettiness, the colors of virginity. Its chairs were upholstered in pink chintz; the dressing-table, which bore a dim-glow-lamp among its silver and linen, was of birdseye-maple, and the window-curtains, now flapping in the air of a night in Spring, were of dotted mull and ruffled.

Just within the circle of low light cast by the night-lamp stood the bed. It was canopied, an old-fashioned four-poster—the only piece of antiquated furniture in the room—and from it was drawn back the generally excluding mosquito-netting.

The Colonel, his weary eyes blind with tears, walked to the bed. He approached it just as he had approached it years before when his wife lay there and when he saw, for the first time, Florida and her foredoomed twin-brother in their mother's arms. Now, as he sank beside it, another pair of arms were flung about his neck, and a hot face was buried upon his thin, shaking shoulders.

"Daddy!"

He bowed his own face against the tumbled masses of her chestnut hair.

"My lil' girl!" he sobbed.

When he spoke again, it was after a long silence that had been broken only by their tears. He held her tight, and she held tight to him. He felt her taut body convulsively wracked, and she knew that his own was torn and broken. He kissed her; he went back to her earliest childhood to find the old pet-names and the old pet-phrases that they had both for so long forgotten, and he found also, through it all, ready on his lips those phrases of grim comfort which seem to be born only in the exultation of despair.

And at last he said:

"Who was it, honey?"

She dug her face deeper and burst again into a fit of crying. The Colonel waited, but at last repeated his question:

"Who was it, child?"

From somewhere in the distance outside far away, and unnoted by both, came the long baying of hounds.

"Don't—don't ask me!" she sobbed.

"But, honey, you don't mind your old daddy."

She squeezed him closer.

"No, no!" she said.

"I knew your mother, most like, didn't ask, and of course you wouldn't tell Jane——"

The hot body shivered.

"I don't want Jane near me!" cried Florida.

"Why, honey, you don't want your cousin Jane? I can't understand. But she won't be told, if that's what you mean. Come, darling"—the Colonel's voice, at her ear, broke like the voice of a child—"nobody else will ever know it. I'm your daddy, sweetheart. It's your old, old daddy, and he's here to protect you; but to protect you right he's got to be told——"

"No, no, no!"

She drew away from him and pressed a pillow about her ears and eyes.

Far off the hounds were baying again, ominously, hungrily.

"But, lil' girl——"

"I don't know who it was! Daddy, I don't know. Oh, go away! Go away and leave me!—I want so to be alone; I so want to be alone!—I love you, Daddy, but—Oh, I don't know who it was. It was

dark. I couldn't see, Daddy! I don't know. I don't know!"

As long as he dared he sought her secret: he did not find it. He had, at last, to kiss her and leave her—and believe that she, indeed, did not know.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE DEVIL'S HUNT

“La tyrannie de la multitude, ce despote des despotes qui ne connaît pas de frein, qui n’a d’autre règle que son caprice, qui se permet tout et peut tout se permettre parce qu’il n’est pas responsable.”

—ARTHUR CHUQUET: “Rousseau.”

## XII

FROM the group before the gate to the Tréville garden, Witherspoon had turned away as soon as Calhoun Ridgeley repeated the name of the man that must have been guilty. Having found that Billy Turner was not about the house, Ollie had said but one thing to the crowd in parting.

"See that no news of *this* gets into the house to-night," he ordered. "They have enough to worry them there."

The men promised, and, with his boyish figure erect, but with his head tilted forward, lips compressed and fiery eyes trying to pierce the darkness, he walked, this Ollie, moving in desperate strides toward the little suburb where was the home of Jane MacDonald. There was no need to go back to the pond now; the revolver: he could get that anywhere. His rage still boiled hot in his veins; the insane lust for requital—for a requital swift, undebatable, complete—drove from his brain every other thought, every other sensation. He crunched up the walk to Jane's house, but he did not stop at the front door. Instead, with a step lightened to assure the surprise of whoever might be in hid-



ing there, he made his way to the back of the place. It was at the kitchen-door that he finally thundered.

There was a faint light in the place, but nobody replied to that first summons. Witherspoon knocked again, and only then was the door opened—opened just enough to permit the black Sally to thrust out a frightened, kinky head.

“Who—who’s there?” she quavered. And then, as the light from within fell upon Witherspoon, she drew quickly back. “You, Mars’ Ollie? Wh—for the Lord’s sake, Mars’, what’s the matter, sir?”

Witherspoon calmly placed his foot between the half-open door and the door-frame.

“Sally,” he asked, “have you seen Billy”—he could hardly get the name from between his lips that hated it—“Billy Turner?”

If his face—the pale, drawn, determined face—had not been sufficient, his voice—a voice utterly unlike his usual tones—would have sufficed to warn her that there was danger afoot for the man whose name he so strangely uttered.

Sally, her large eyes popping from their sockets, drew back. She made as if to close the door.

“’Deed—’deed no, Mars’ Ollie,” she stammered. “I don’t know where Billy Turner is. I ain’t seen him this long while.”

He might just possibly have believed her if she had said that she had not seen Turner that evening, but when she said that she had not seen him for a

long while she too greatly overstated her case. The mulatto was her lover; for her to declare that he had not been with her for several days was to tell Witherspoon that she had something to conceal.

"Quit your lying!" snapped Ollie.

Although what light there was came from behind her, Witherspoon could see that her dark cheeks had become ashen.

"'Deed—'deed I ain't lying, Mars' Ollie," she stammered; "I ain't seen that Billy Turner nowhere."

Again she started to close the door, but Witherspoon shoved his foot a few inches forward and stopped her. He thrust in his hand, grasped her arm and held it, swinging her into the open air.

"Now then," he said, "you tell me the truth—the truth, do you hear? Something has happened over yonder—something has happened to a lady. Do you understand?"

The girl nearly fell to her knees. He had been prepared for this, however. He knew that in this countryside his words were enough to strike terror into any black.

"Well, now," pursued Witherspoon, his wrath mounting as he felt her flesh beneath his fingers, "I know who did it—and I'm after Billy Turner."

Sally's knees gave way completely. She dropped on the sill before him, her arm wrenched from his grasp, her white teeth clattering.

"O, Mars' Ollie," she wailed, "it wouldn't be Billy. You *know* it wouldn't be Billy! For God's sake, Mars' Ollie—O, Mars' Ollie——"

Witherspoon shook her into momentary silence.

"Stop that," he commanded, "and tell me where he is."

"I ain't seen him, Mars' Ollie. Before God, I ain't seen him nowhere."

Witherspoon knew nothing of the fifty dollars that Sanborn had entrusted to Turner for Cal; he of course did not know that Billy had come to Beau-fain's Pond too late to deliver it, but in time to learn, unseen, what had happened and in time to realize that suspicion would be placed on him as the most likely black. Ollie could not guess that Turner had come to his sweetheart only for consolation and advice and without thought of using the money that was not his own; nor did he stop then to consider how, if his present words should be overheard by Billy, the mulatto would certainly be frightened into the flight toward which his every instinct must already be tugging him.

Instead, Witherspoon's reasoning had been simple and, although mistaken, had brought him to a few conclusions dangerously correct. He had not bothered to go first to that shanty in the black quarter of the town where, when not at the railroad-cutting or "The Palmettos," Billy made what he called his home: Turner, Ollie argued, would come first to

Sally. He would come to Sally because he would of course try to run away—negroes in such cases always did. Billy was clever enough to know that a successful flight—thus Witherspoon reasoned—would require money; Billy would realize the need of quick moving; Billy always spent all his money before the sunset of pay-day; he was paid fortnightly; his last pay-day was a week ago. Sally, on the other hand, was notoriously thrifty: Turner would seek her for money to assist his flight.

"Yes, you have seen him," said Witherspoon. "He came to you for money."

"But I *ain't* seen him, Mars' Ollie!"

"You have. You'd know where he'd be, anyhow. He's your lover, ain't he?"

"Yes; but, on my soul, I ain't set eyes on him!"

"Stop that! He's——" Witherspoon paused. He looked down at the cowering girl, and then started suddenly forward into the room. "I believe you're hiding him in there right now!" he cried.

In an agony of fear, Sally flung her frail arms about his knees. Witherspoon lurched. The door flew open, and he pitched to the floor; but as he fell he caught sight of the interior of the dimly lighted kitchen and saw the figure of a man—the man he was after—climbing out of the open window.

"Stop there!" he shouted.

But the negro girl held fast to his legs, and the pair rolled over and over on the floor, Sally sobbing

protestations, Ollie struggling to free himself and threatening death to any that detained him. They crashed at length into the leg of a table. The right hand of the negress was bashed against it, her hold loosened, and Ollie, with a yell, sprang, liberated, and leaped through the door into the night.

Ahead of him, somewhere on the road, he could hear the sound of running feet. Breathless, thoughtless—the lust of the hunter whipping him on—he bounded forward to follow.

They tore up the road—pursued and pursuer. Ollie, pounding an eighth of a mile in the rear, now seemed to gain ground and now to lose it. The moon was rising, but the wind had freshened and, with a promise of storm, clouds, driving across the sky, made sight uncertain. Once Witherspoon was sure that he saw the hatless form racing through the night; but, for the most part, he had, at the start, to trust to his ears, and he was desperate when, just as he began to believe in his ultimate victory, he heard the running footsteps pause.

Ollie knew what that meant. It meant that the mulatto was leaving the road; that he would cut southward toward the negro-quarter of the now nearby city—that he was running toward his own home. As this realization came to Witherspoon, the clouds parted, and, in the moonlight, he saw the fugitive vaulting a fence into the open fields.

It was Billy Turner. There was no mistaking.

It was the young mulatto whose whole connection with the Tréville family had been such that nobody could have supposed——

Witherspoon stopped short. He stood absolutely still.

Something within him had awakened. To all intents and purposes, he was at striking-distance of his prey. He had but to keep up the chase until Turner had reached his miserable cabin. Once run to that cover, there needed but a general alarm to rouse the city and end the tragedy. Yet Witherspoon stopped.

Perhaps it was the fact that the race was all but won. Perhaps it was because the thing seemed too easy. Perhaps it was that the mad self was exhausted by the pursuit and the sane self able at last to resume dominion. But, for whatever reason, Ollie, without further argument, found himself cold, calm, emptied of the blood-lust, and bitterly ashamed.

What had he to gain? Would blood atone? Suppose he overtook the runaway and, with his own fingers, squeezed out that wretched life—what would result? Would what had happened be undone by that? Would even the news of it, the horrid knowledge of the world, be lessened by his deed? And suppose he did no more than seize this ruffian and turn him over for the law to play with and punish—the law, which would be public, which would drag Florida Tréville from her home to testify, which would say nothing without its audience, say nothing

without its journalistic chronicling—would he, who had already forced Cal to speak too plainly before a gang of idlers at the gate of his sweetheart's house—would Witherspoon be helping Florida by that?

He sat down beside the road, panting. He remembered all his former principles. He remembered who he was and what he was and what he and his had always stood for. And he realized how close he had come not only to a betrayal of all this, but also to an aggravation of this miscreant's offense by the commission of an act that would make the offense all the more notorious.

And, besides, how could he, as yet, be certain that Turner was guilty? Cal had seen the fellow in the neighborhood of Beaufain's Pond—no more than that; and even Cal, himself a murderer, had protested that this evidence was insufficient. Flight, in the case of a negro, proved nothing: that Billy had fled at Witherspoon's approach signified not at all; there was not a black man in the neighborhood that, hearing such threats as Ollie had made, would not have run away. And yet, here had been Witherspoon close to making himself the thing that Cal had been on the evening of the killing of Jim Jackson.

Without another glance in the direction in which Turner had gone, Ollie retraced his latest steps and made off toward his own home. He was fully grown at last. . . .



The road, after he had left it, remained, for a quarter of an hour, silent and deserted. Overhead scudding clouds dashed across the sky, momentarily growing swifter and blacker. The trees tossed fretfully. Now and then the newly risen moon shone, but the moonlight grew less and less frequent, and then, from afar, there rose the low rumble of thunder.

The low rumble of thunder of which the echoes seemed strange, and strangely prolonged. They were not like the thing they mimicked, those echoes. They were distinct, separate. They were ominous, threatening, imminent. They were a sound like the steady advancing of a pack of hunters. And, as the sound drew nearer, had Witherspoon been there to hear it, he would have known it to be no echo, but the baying of bloodhounds in full cry.

For what had balked the individual, the mob had accomplished. A few moments after Witherspoon stalked away from the Tréville gate in one direction, and the dark figure of Cal slipped into the shadows at the other, the breaths of the little group of tavern loafers and rural idlers mingled and had been formed into a separate spirit that controlled them all. It was a spirit that harnessed them, that rode, seated in the air, above them, and that lashed them on. It cracked its whip, and they went mad.

Somebody—none knew who, and the speaker less than all—said that this crime must be avenged.



Somebody—not even he through whose mouth came the words would remember who had spoken—declared that the criminal must hang, before the law, which all men think they have made and few at heart respect, could quibble and delay and free him. Somebody—still somebody unconscious of his own utterance—said that Billy Turner must, that night, swing.

Therewith was the 'spell wrought. The mention of the crime that had been committed, the mention of the law that would be delayed and the mention of the penalty that ought to be inflicted—these three things, said together, raised that devil which men call the Spirit of the Mob.

Hither and thither black shadows darted along the road. Lanterns fluttered like angry fireflies. Voices whispered like cruel ghosts. Now the darting lights fell upon glinting steel, now upon a heavy fist gripping a coiled rope, and then through the night came the scurrying patter of lighter, more agile feet, the sound of quick sniffing, the low excited whine of dogs that tug at a leash.

The crowd had grown with every passing moment, a deed of the dark drawing dark recruits from darkness. The half-dozen had grown to twelve; the twelve to a score. They surged right and left, forward and backward, but the Devil behind them cracked his whip, and they surged across the fields to Beaufain's Pond.

There the sounds grew louder. Pine-knots flamed under the arching trees and were reflected, struggling, on the lapping waters.

A hoarse voice came out of nowhere:

"Got any clothes of Turner's?"

And a hoarse voice from nowhere made answer:

"Here's a shoe I got from the niggers at 'The Palmettos.'"

In the light of a pine-knot, a dirty hand held a battered boot before six sniffing muzzles, and then the hounds were unleashed.

They snapped through the underbrush. They crackled over the leaves and twigs. They ran, with low cries—with cries of mounting intensity they ran—in widening circles under the trees. Their noses pushed close to the ground; their muscles, when the light fell upon them, were twitching. Finally, from the very edge of the woods came a cry—quick, low, rallying: one dog had found the scent—and instantly, after him, over the salt grass of the meadow, across the fields, across the fences, across the night, away ran the dogs, and the men-become-dogs, all mingling their voices in the long, low baying of a bloodhound-pack. The Devil's Hunting had begun.

A man that ran in the rear of them—a man that was not driven by the Devil that drove them, but was chained to the Devil's car, a dark giant of a man, who hung backward where he could not be seen, but was dragged forward where he must see—

this man saw them enter the quiet little suburb, saw them break through the hedge about the rear of the house of Jane MacDonald, saw the light as the kitchen-door was splintered, heard the cries and oaths as a girl pleaded and men cursed, and then heard a hound yelp and saw the mob rudely reform and run forward. The scent had been recovered and, up the empty road, the Devil cheered forward his pack.

The thunder rumbled, but neither man nor dog heeded it. Through the banked clouds, like tottering celestial fortresses, a bolt of lightning would ply its crooked course, but none regarded it. The storm was almost ready to break above their heads, but they could not see it for the tumult of the storm that the lash of the master's whip was beating to fury in their hearts.

They left the road. They crossed more fields. They came to the narrow, almost tropic streets of the negro-quarter, where teeming life seemed forever to have banished sleep.

The flames of the rushing pine-knots gave it a fierce illumination. They lit up, like flashing pictures seen in a dream, the squalid alleys, the cluttered clothes-lines ablaze with color, the desperate outside stairways, the broken panes, the rickety balconies, the sagging roofs, the rags and dirt.

One instant the houses burst with the population and spewed it into the street—bright-turbaned

women and men with shining eyes; white-haired negroes sucking at corn-cob pipes; groups bending by the windows over greasy games; children tumbling in the gutters, black babies at their mothers' breasts. The next, and there were wild scurries for shelter; frightened screechings; banging doors; lights extinguished—all the tokens of a terror gathered from a terrible history.

The man that followed hard behind heard the hounds utter a new cry, a fiercer, madder cry. He saw the pack of dogs and men halt before a house that was already dark, and beat and break about it as the tide beats and breaks about a frail pier. He thought that he could see the very house rock under the force of it.

He heard a loud call, followed by an unanswering silence. He heard the call, now a choral shout, repeated, and again he heard no answer. He heard a rush of feet encircling the shanty. He heard palings ripped from the fence—the staccato tinkle of broken glass—the smashing of a door.

The man that followed tried to go away. Nobody had seen him; nobody held him. But he could not turn his feet; he could not turn his head; he could not turn his eyes. He slunk into the shadow of an alley that a moment before was crowded, but now was empty. He twisted his body, but in vain. He put his fingers into his ears, but he withdrew them. He flung his hands before his eyes, but some-

thing drew his hands down. In all that frightened quarter, his was the most frightened soul.

He saw the swirling lights and he heard the conquerors' roar as the crowd belched from the house and surrounded a lamp-post. He knew how swift the thing would be—no time for pleading, no question or answer; only the tumultuous rush to quick mutilation, the stampede to hurried death. He heard the sharp, high cry of a man in agony and terror—the cry of a man that abandons manhood; it cut the night. He heard the low, loud *gr-r-r*, the long-drawn, penetrating *ha-a-a*, the sound that is the sound of no man, but of many men—the speech of the Mob. He raised his hands again, but again the something dragged them back to his sides, and he saw, silhouetted against the farther flames of the pine-knots, something high above the ground—something black at a rope's end—something that writhed.

A bolt of lightning sent crumbling one of the fortresses in the sky. It lighted up the alley where was covering—where, as if in hideous supplication to God, was kneeling—the man that had followed. It showed, for an instant, with none to see, the face of one for whom fought mounting horror and cringing fear.

The Devil's Hunt was ended.

## CHAPTER XIII

"CAL TOLD YOU THAT?"

“Not with the old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

—ST. PAUL: First Epistle to the Corinthians.

### XIII

EASTER morning, with the air bathed in yellow sunshine, the earth luminous with peace; Easter with the sky a turquoise blue; Easter morning, with every flower abloom, with every bird athrob in song; Easter, the day on which men revive their hope of the resurrection: thus it came, that year and to that portion of America, just as every Easter should. Nature, as always, was doing her best for the humankind: failure was theirs, not hers.

Sanborn met the morning with a weary heart: he remembered his ride from the doctor's house and the distant shouting that he had heard in the night, to learn, only after the noise had died away, what it was that had died with the noise. Jane MacDonald opened her eyes upon it in her own bedroom in her own house, where, on her return from "The Palmettos," Sally had greeted her with a story too dreadful at once to be believed. Ollie Witherspoon chafed at its delay, because he wanted to hurry to the Trévilles' for news of Florida. How or where Calhoun Ridgeley met it nobody but the tavern-landlord knew.



It was on his way, hours later, to inquire for Jane that Sanborn came upon Witherspoon, bound to inquire for Florida, and got from Ollie what little that young man had already gathered of uncertain neighborhood gossip. The lynching was already ancient history; Cal, Witherspoon thought, had not been concerned in it. Affairs at "The Palmettos," so the word went, were as well as could be hoped and no better than they should be: Florida was reported much improved, but her mother had at last been prostrated by the shock of the previous evening and the Colonel, since his daughter insisted on solitude, had refused to leave the bedside of his wife. Witherspoon would know more, of course, on his return. Each man pursued his way.

So far as it went, gossip, in fact, had been far nearer right about the Trévilles than gossip usually is about anything. Mrs. Tréville was ill, though not dangerously so; she was attended by her husband; and Florida, physically much better, was, at her own command, alone. Moreover, Florida was soon to go away. That she had demanded, with weak insistence. She wanted to go away without leaving any word of her destination behind her, and she had so wept when this was at first denied her that it was at length agreed that she should go to St. Briec, or some other quiet watering-place in Brittany: upon her vehemently declining Jane's offer to go with her, it was settled that Mrs. Tréville should, as soon as

her own strength permitted, be her daughter's traveling-companion, the Colonel—grown much older through that dreadful night, but still indomitable—declaring that he would not budge from the home of his ancestors.

Florida's father had renewed his questions, but the girl maintained her reticence. She persisted that she was in entire ignorance of her assailant's identity, and that she could give no further clue. Then, when the Colonel heard the news of the lynching—angry at this course, which had both violated his code and made still more public the thing that he considered his family's disgrace—he concluded that the guilty man had, after all, been found and, in order to spare Florida more excitement, he gave orders that nobody in the household should tell her of Billy Turner's death.

That afternoon the girl, looking out of her window from the bedroom where she had asked them to leave her undisturbed, saw, hobbling through the garden, her bull-terrier. Doctor Pickens had found the Colonel's causal diagnosis mistaken and had spared the dog's life: Teddy was battered and cut, but no bones were broken; and Florida, now observing his condition, called to him.

Her voice was very low, and the dog did not hear her. She called again, but Teddy had managed to manifest a slight interest in an anthill and refused to heed. Florida, with the persistence which charac-

terizes the passing whims of the nervous convalescent, wanted to console the wounded animal. She did not wish to meet the eyes of a servant, but she did want the dog.

She listened intently. Evidently that wing of the rambling old dwelling was empty. She looked out at the garden; its gray wall and splendid old trees hid it from the road. The sunlight filtered through the leaves, the silence was unbroken. She was sure that she would be as much alone down there as here in her own room. Softly, with frightened glance, with trembling fingers and unsteady steps, she opened the door and tiptoed down stairs. A moment later, on that stone bench beneath the roses, where Sanborn had made love to Jane, she was crooning over the brindled form of Teddy, who whined to her, partly in pity for himself and partly in mere sympathy with the tones of his mistress.

Witherspoon was beside her before either of them could retreat. She had been at last too occupied with the dog to hear him; he, calling at the house upon his mission of formal inquiry, had hesitated before knocking and had wandered down this by-path.

“Ollie!”

She half rose. A faint flush began at the spot where the soft white folds of her loose gown met the ivory of her throat. It spread upward to her cheek; it touched her brown eyes and filled them; it

mounted to her clustering brown hair. She started to put out a hand; then dropped it and sank back upon the seat.

But Witherspoon had not suffered in vain. In eighteen hours he had known love and hate. He had descended into an *avernus* where he had found the woman of his heart's desire, and had borne her bruised body upward to the light again. His heart had swelled with the lust for murder, his throat had strained with the thirst for vengeance, his hand had almost been raised to strike—and he had conquered. The boy had become a man.

One cannot grow up, even in a night, and fail to show it. Witherspoon stood with his old erect manner, but what might once have been assurance was now composure. His face was still young, but it was also fine. Already the lines of strength were proving, in him, how much more beautiful is strength than beauty.

"Flor'da," he said, and put out his hand.

But she drew away—she drew away shuddering.

Twenty-four hours ago, he would have left her, because she wanted it; he would have obeyed her because he loved her. Now because he loved her, he disobeyed. He had heard of the lynching with emotions too mixed to permit of immediate analysis; he was sure, however, of his feelings for her. He sat down beside her. The dog leaped to the ground and wandered off, limping, among the trees.

"You won't shake hands?" asked Witherspoon.

Her head was drooping, her face was turned from him. He could see only her neck below the little curls at the back, and the neck was rosy.

"You won't shake hands?" he repeated.

"Oh, don't speak to me! Don't!" Her voice choked her. "I can't bear it."

"Flor'da," he said, "sooner or later you must see us all. I didn't think to meet you just now, but, since it's happened, I know we'd better begin at once."

"Go away!" she whispered. "Please go away!"

Witherspoon did not budge. An old resolve was translating itself into the terms of action. He had always thought that she preferred Ridgeley to him, but now— Well, now, he was alone with her, and he knew that he had grown. He waited a moment for her to turn, but as she did not turn, he said, very quietly:

"Flor'da, I am right glad that I saw you now."

She struggled for breath, but she would not look at him.

"Why do you say that?" she asked. "When you know I want you to go, why do you stay? Why do you torment me?"

"Because, Flor'da, I want to ask you something right now. I want you to be my wife."

She wheeled then, instantly. Her face was blazing, and with indignation.

"Don't dare to say that!" she cried. "I don't want for you to dare say such things. I don't want your pity!"

He met her eyes with eyes unfaltering. He understood.

"I love you, Flor'da."

He spoke simply; no one could have looked at him and doubted him, but Florida's gaze had fallen.

"I have always loved you, Flor'da," he said. "And now——"

She seized at that hesitation as a man, delirious from wounds, seeks to tear his wounds open.

"Now," she took him up, "you think that you must be chivalrous! Oh, I know you're good, Ollie," she went on, with a pang that bade her do him this tardy justice: "I know you're good and fine, but I see—I see—and, because I know what you really feel, I could wish you were hard and cruel to me, rather than generous and kind!"

He shook his head.

"If I was generous and kind," he said, "I'd go away like you tell me to do; but I'm small and selfish, and so I stay."

"No, no—you mustn't." She put out her slim hands as if to push him away. "You *are* generous and kind," she continued: "you are brave and fine. I see that now. I used to think of you as being just a boy that'd never grow up; but now——" her hands went up to her bowed face—"now—to-day—I'm be-

ginning to understand that yesterday I understood just nothing at all."

He bent nearer to her; he touched her hands. She drew back, but her hands fell from before her crimsoned cheeks.

"I tell you I love you," he persisted; "and that means I need you, Flor'da; it means that I've always needed you."

Her eyes grew round.

"Need me?" she whispered.

He took a great breath: "This thing—this thing that you're thinking about—what has that got to do with my loving you, one way or the other—what has that got to do with it?"

Her red lips parted. There was a height to which, because she had never before seen it, she could not at once follow him. Yet one thing held her to the spot—though only one thing, she was sure. Save for that, she would at once have run away and hidden—hidden anywhere with her shame. But the past night had done much for her: it had broken down convention and set up truth in convention's stead—the worst had happened; what mattered what else now?—it had called upon all her courage, and all her worship of courage, and it had shown her that the finest courage is of the moral sort. Witherspoon had spoken: she owed him an honest answer.

"You must think small of me," she murmured, "if



you believe I could take you at your word. If you loved me after—after what has happened—and if I loved you—Ollie, do you think I'd do you such a hurt as to marry you?"

The thing, he saw, must be directly faced, and he resolved to face it without delay.

"Flor'da," he began, "they say in the psychologies that when a person has an hallucination, there is just one thing for that person to do: he must walk right up to the phantom and try to touch it. The ghost is nearly always a piece of cloth fluttering from a hatrack, or a sheet flying in the dark from a clothes-line. If the person that thinks it's a phantom runs away, he'll become the sort of coward that sees ghosts all his lifelong thereafter; but if he only has the courage, first off, to walk up to it and touch it, he'll see that it's only the fluttering cloth or the flying sheet, and he won't ever be afraid of ghosts any more."

Florida's face was turned away. His voice had broken, but he went on:

"Well, it's time right now for you to walk up and examine this ghost that's scaring you. Try it. It's not pleasant, but try it. Be brave. It's nothing but a false phantom, Flor'da."

Had he seen them, he would have realized that now her brown eyes were wide with a startled inquiry.

"I don't know what you're meaning," she said.



"You say I pity you," he answered. "Pity you? Yes. I pity you, but I don't pity you because of last night. I pity you only because of the way you let yourself be affected by it."

"You mean to deny—a *fact*?"

"No, dear, no: I mean only to accept a fact. I mean to discard a phantom, Flor'da. I mean that we must remember what happened and that, remembering it, we'll see we must forget all that didn't happen—forget all we only *think* it meant."

Again she had hidden her burning face between her slim white hands.

"Don't!" she breathed.

But Witherspoon, now like the pitiless surgeon, only drove his knife the deeper—like a surgeon operating to save the life of his own child.

"Listen," he said; "you must listen to this, indeed, you must. Some one's got for to tell you, and why shouldn't it be I, who love you so? You think yourself stained. Why? Can the real *you* be stained by anything that the real *you* doesn't do of its own will? You think that you've been what the conventions call—call 'ruined.' Why? In Heaven's name, *why*? For no other reason on earth than that a parcel of people—who never could have given any reason on their part—always have thought that absurd sort of thing in years that are long passed and daid and done with."

Her head was still in her hands.

"You say all this, Ollie," she whispered, "because you love me."

"I say it because it is the truth, Flor'da. If my own son was in love with a girl that I otherwise didn't want him to marry, and if this thing happened to that girl, I'd still have to say to my son just what I'm saying now to you."

"But the thing is done," she moaned between her fingers. "Not all the reasoning—not all the love in the world—can undo what has once been done!"

"No, not all the love or reasoning in the world, or all the punishment for that matter, can undo what is done—for the person that did it. But not all that has been done can really hurt the person to whom it was done. I've been thinking hard, Flor'da, and I know that this is just what's terrible about our sins: the more that we try to injure another, we only injure ourselves the deeper."—His voice was very tender—"And this kind of wrong hurts nobody but the one that inflicts it. If a man cut off your hand, would you be held to blame? Wouldn't you still be *you*? It's only what you do yourself that changes you; nobody can change a man or a woman but the man or the woman's own self." Although he spoke softly, he was earnest, steady, calm. "Well, aren't you still Flor'da Tréville?"

"No, no!" she moaned. "That's just it: I'm not. I'm not what I was; I'm nothing any more."

"You are. You're the Flor'da of yesterday—of

all your life. Do you think I love you so little as to love only your body? It's your soul I love the better, dear, and the soul's unchanged."

She rocked to and fro in a tempest of grief.

"You don't know," she sobbed; "you don't know!"

"You're still thinking about what folks say," he protested. "Talking won't change truth, else there'd be no truth in this evil-speaking world to-day. If you mind what folks say—I don't, but if you do—we'll go away."

"No, no. It's not that. I'm thinking of the truth. I'm trying to find the truth. And I can't be sure—I can't be sure *what* I ought to do!"

"Of course you can be sure. Something happened. Ve'y well. But did you do it? No. Were you a party to it? No. Then how can you be held responsible for the acts of another person?"

She rose at that and stood before him. Her body, clothed in its flowing garment of white, lifted itself above him like the body of some tragic statue, and the suddenly spellbound Witherspoon, looking up at her, saw her pale face fixed, determined, the red lips pressed so tightly together that they were only a faint pink, the eyes intent, searching.

"Listen here to *me*," she said at last. "Suppose worse than you have supposed yet. Suppose I had been attracted, against my will. Suppose that, without wholly knowing it, but knowing it in part, I had

done this or that, moved thus or so—lil' things, each in itself, but all together enough to attract—*him*. Suppose I'd felt a dreadful liking. Suppose that I'd done and felt these things until I came to understand, just at the last, what it all meant; *what then?*"

"*What?*" cried Witherspoon.

He was on his feet in an instant. He had thought of last night's event only as a crime against her; he still thought of it only as the crime of a negro.

That Florida, wrapped in her own grievous knowledge, did not realize. She shook her head sadly.

"You see," she said.

But Witherspoon had not grown up for nothing. If the dead man had been guilty—and of course, if he had not, some other man of his race had been—then these strange words were but the unmeaning speech of hysteria: it was impossible otherwise to consider them. He was ashamed of his hesitation; he would humor her because he loved her. His voice was even lower than before, but it was still steady; he remained the master of his tongue.

"You have answered your own question," he replied. "You say: 'Till you came to understand.' What you do without understanding can't count."

He stopped a moment.

"We can't control, all at once, our desires," he presently continued; "but we can all the time control

our own actions, and in the end that means that the desires must perish. Flor'da, do you care enough about me to marry me? I love you, Flor'da."

She was still looking at him, and, looking thus, she could not but remember the face of another—a face that she had once thought strong, because it envisaged stormy passions that enslaved it—and she could not but realize that here before her was a face strong because the owner had proved himself stronger than his own passions. It was as if she had always subconsciously known these things. And yet was Witherspoon, after all, as logical as he was fine? And was what she now felt growing in her heart for him the thing that she had once felt or that other? Which was love? And if that earlier emotion had turned to such a loathing that she had resolutely shut every thought of the other man from her heart—every curiosity as to where he was and what he endured—was there still, lurking somewhere in those dark corners of her soul, which she now so dreaded, a shadow that might one day again appear and make her afraid? These were questions that must be answered before she could answer the question that Witherspoon had put to her; and alone time, or some new crisis—some quick, compelling revelation—could forever answer them.

"I don't know," she said. "Ollie, I'm—I'm not worthy to kiss the ground you walk on——"

"Flor'da!"

"No," she shook her head with a wistful smile; "no, I'm not, Ollie. But if you really care, and if you think you'll keep on caring—well, will you wait until I know for sure?"

His eyes softened.

"I'll wait just as long as you'll let me wait," he said.

"It's not that I deserve it," she went on: "it's only that, knowing how much *you* deserve, I don't want to give you anything till I'm sure—sure—that I can give you the best I have."

But he would not have that. He would not let her think him better than he was.

"Don't talk so about me, Flor'da," he protested. "You don't know what I've been. Last night, when this thing happened, I had murder in my heart. I almost did murder, Flor'da. I stopped. I went away. But if I had done what I set out to do—— That's what I meant, partly, when I said that we weren't to blame for our desires, so long as we controlled our actions. I was excusing myself, too, Flor'da; for, if I had done what I set out last night to do——"

Her face had changed. Her eyes were staring.

"Yes, yes?" she urged.

"Why, it'd been Ollie Witherspoon instead of that mob that'd now be guilty." The woman leaned toward him. Her face flushed again and then again went pale.

"Guilty?" she whispered. "Mob?"

He gasped. He saw, in a flash, that she had not before been told.

"Didn't—didn't you know?"

She gripped his arms.

"Who was it? Who was it? Who was it?" she cried.

"The man," he stammered. "The nigger."

"What?" Her voice grew shrill. He felt her grip tighten. "Oh, for God's sake, *who was it?*"

He tried to hold back now; he tried to save her from what he was sure was the return of last night's hysteria. But she dragged the truth out of him.

"The nigger, I tell you, Flor'da. I thought you must know by now. Try to be calmer. It was Billy Turner, of course."

"It was Billy Turner?"

"Yes, Flor'da. I'm sorry. I thought of course you knew."

He tried to quiet her; she shook him off.

"And they—they—they killed him?"

Witherspoon bowed a silent assent.

"Oh!" The girl released him. She flung her hands high above her head. She reeled. But when Witherspoon sprang to seize her, she drew herself erect. "And—and Cal—Cal Ridgeley," she demanded; "where was he?"

"Why, I don't know." Witherspoon divined that she judged Ridgeley from her memory of the shoot-



ing of Jim Jackson, and assumed him a leader of the lynchers. "I don't think he was there. His only part in it"—Witherspoon had a sense of justice—"was to put us on the track."

*"He put you on the track?"*

"Yes. That is, he was the only one that had been anywhere near Beaufain's Pond, and so I asked him what nigger he'd seen. Flor'da, it's all over now. Please, please try——"

She gripped his arms again.

"And he told you he'd seen Billy Turner there—Cal Ridgeley did?"

"Why, don't blame him, Flor'da. What else could he say? In his position, if he'd been black, we'd just as naturally have suspected that he was the man!"

"But Cal—told—you—told you——"

"Yes, Flor'da."

The girl drew herself to her full height.

"Ollie," she said—and he had never before heard a woman speak in such a voice—"go right away and find Cal Ridgeley for me. Tell him to come here—to come now—at once—to me. Tell him I'll be in the room with the bow-window yonder. Tell him to come immediately. Do you understand?"





## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE DOOR OF DOUBT

"Qui a bu, qui boira."

—GEORGES LAFENESTRE: "La Fontaine."

## XIV

**F**AR as he still was from guessing the truth, Witherspoon could not fail to appreciate the intensity of Florida's purpose. How much of this intensity was the mere result of her desperately nervous condition, and how much was the effect of a desire to tell Cal, who also loved her, some secret of that awful night which she might communicate to nobody else, Witherspoon was unable satisfactorily to determine. That, however, her mind was set upon an obedience to her latest orders he could not deny. He saw, at a glance, that argument would be futile, and he feared that any unnecessary delay would add a new strain to a delicate organization already desperately tried.

"Ve'y well," he agreed; "I'll find him."

"And you'll see that he comes?" she pursued.

"Why, of course he'll come at once when he hears you want to see him, Flor'da."

"Will he? I don't know. But I want you to promise that you'll see that he does come."

Witherspoon could not comprehend; but he did not hesitate over his answer.

"Yes, I'll promise," he said; "I'll see for sure that he gets here. Trust me."

The girl's brown eyes showed her gratitude.

"And, Flor'da," began Ollie, "you won't forget——"

"Forget what?"

"That you're going to try—a lil' bit—to care?"

But she looked at him only as if he referred to something of which she had never heard before.

"Go! Go!" she said.

He left her then. He went down the long walk under the palmettos and live-oaks and through the gate, pondering. Once on the road, he heard the sound of light feet pattering after him and turned to see Teddy hobbling behind. At first, observing the dog's battered condition, he ordered the terrier back to the grounds of the Tréville house; but the dog looked up at him with big eyes plainly pleading, wagged a tail that drooped in supplication and uttered a low whine, which was so pathetic a plea for a little exercise and companionship in the open that Witherspoon had no heart left for refusal.

"All right," he said, "come along, boy"—and the dog, eyes brightened and tail erect, trotted on ahead.

Ollie, with a stab of pain, remembered Teddy's affection for Cal. "You might almost believe he knew where I was going," he ruefully reflected. "And I wonder what it is that I'm going for."

To a man in love, his rival circumscribes the horizon, and the question of his sweetheart's emotions precludes, for the greater part of the time, all other

puzzles. To Witherspoon it did not occur, as he walked down the white roadway on this Spring afternoon, that there could be any but a sentimental reason for Florida's desire to see Cal. Either she wanted him to come to her in order that she might discover his part in the lynching and learn from his lips the terrible details that she might very well wish, terrible as they were, to know, or else her desire to see the other lover was the natural desire to learn how that one would regard her present plight, weigh his feelings toward her and what had happened to her against those which Witherspoon had expressed, and thus strike between her two lovers the balance that she had promised.

To Ollie it did not appear strange that Florida should have sent him as her messenger upon such an errand. There was none else at hand. Indeed, had there been some other, Witherspoon would have thought it fitting that he be selected. The issue lay between himself and Cal. He was willing to hasten this errand and to abide by the result.

Just where Cal might be he was not certain; but the tavern lay nearest of all likely places, and Witherspoon, having gathered that Ridgeley had not been to "The Palmettos" to inquire for the people there, surmised that Cal might now be considering their situation by the assistance of his favorite stimulant. The Sunday-laws, Ollie knew, were never rigidly enforced at the hostelry; he knew, too, that

Cal's birth commanded a respect and Cal's strength of arm an obedience that, law or no law, the landlord of the tavern generally accorded. He decided, therefore, first to seek the inn.

He was not wrong in his previsions. Both the front windows and the front-door of the bar-room were religiously closed, but, when Witherspoon rattled, unanswered, at the knob, he heard, inside, a heavy movement that convinced him of Cal's presence. He continued, accordingly, to the rear.

There the landlord met him.

"I want to go into your bar-room," said Ollie.

The landlord, a thin, lank man with a lantern-jaw and an expression of placid melancholy, shook his frowzy head.

"Bar's closed, Mr. Witherspoon," he said; "don't forget this here's Sunday."

"I know what day of the week it is," Ollie answered, "but I want you to take me into your bar-room. I want to see Mr. Ridgeley."

The landlord's jaw dropped.

"Mr. Witherspoon," he said, "Mr. Ridgeley's there sure enough, but you better not go in to see him—indeed you better not, Mr. Witherspoon. He ain't fit to see nobody."

"I don't care for that. Take me in."

"But, Mr. Witherspoon, he's been in there since before sun-up, when he come a-hammerin' at this here back-door. He like to break my arm when I

tried to keep him out, and he's been there ever since."

"Drinking, of course?"

"I dunno what else he'd be doing in there. I didn't dare tell Mr. Sanborn about it—let alone go in myself. And you better not go in, Mr. Witherspoon—indeed and indeed, you better not. I looked in once, an hour ago, and he threw a bottle at me."

Witherspoon did not hesitate.

"I'll take my chances with Mr. Ridgeley," he said.

"Let me by."

He brushed the landlord aside, leaving Teddy in the road, passed down a short hall and knocked at the stout bar-room door.

"Cal!" he called.

There was no reply. He assailed the door for a third time.

"Cal," he repeated. "This is Ollie Witherspoon. I want to see you. Let me in."

His was the tone of authority. Again he heard a heavy shuffling from within the bar-room.

"Hurry up!" he commanded.

A low voice—a strange, hunted voice—made, after a momentary pause, its heavy answer:

"What for do you want me?"

"I have a message for you. Let me in."

There was another brief silence. Then the same voice responded:

"You can give me your message where you stand."

"I can," said Ollie, "but I won't. If you don't



let me in, I'll break down this door and come in anyway."

"You better not try."

"I'll do it, Cal."

"Well—are you alone?"

"Certainly I'm alone. Quit your nonsense and open this door, Cal Ridgeley."

The heavy feet trailed across the floor. There was the loud grating of a bolt, and then the door swung cautiously open some few inches.

From the bar, on which it stood, a smoking kerosene lamp was the only light in the closely shuttered room, and this, being at Cal's back, hid his face from the intruder. Witherspoon, however, pressed his knee quickly against the door and stepped inside. He heard the door being shut and locked behind him and then, turning, got a good look at his unwilling host.

The big man stood with a pronounced stoop, his shoulders drawn forward, his long, bowed arms hanging loosely at his sides. His boots and his corduroys were caked with mud. His head, thrust out at a sharp angle, was covered with matted hair and under it, out of a face that had grown yellow, his eyes shone like the eyes of an animal that hears the gaining gallop of the pursuer that will kill. Wrought upon as Cal had been by the killing of Jackson, haggard as he had appeared at the hour of last evening's catastrophe, Witherspoon was

amazed at the change made in Ridgeley by what Ollie believed to be solitary grief and rage for the occurrences of the preceding night—the grief and rage that one like Cal would force himself to feel. Here, he reflected, was the sort of man that would whip himself into a dangerous torrent of anger over the wrong done to the girl he loved.

But Cal interrupted his stare.

“Now, then,” he said, “what is it?”

All about him the room faded away into shadow. The air was heavy with the stale odors of the last night’s carouse. On a table, drawn near the bar—drawn within the uncertain light of the lamp, as if he that had been sitting in the chair beside it were afraid of the darkness—stood a bottle and a glass, but Witherspoon noticed, with unfeigned surprise, that the blue government bonding-seal across the bottle’s cork was unbroken.

“You’ve not been drinking?” he asked, disregarding the question that Cal had thrown at him.

“Is that so amazing?” growled Ridgeley. “Can’t I sit down without taking a drink? No, I’ve not been drinking. I’m—I’m not well; I don’t want to drink. Take something yourself if you want it—and tell me what all’s the matter.”

Ollie shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t care for a drink,” he answered.

“Well”—Cal was still standing motionless as if he expected an attack—“what do you want then?”

"I have just come from 'The Palmettos,'" said Ollie.

Cal shrank back into the obscurity. He waited a moment before replying.

"How—how is she?" he then demanded.

"Flor'da?"—Why had the man not asked this before? Had he turned against her, too?—"She's better—ve'y much better. I've seen her."

Cal started. "You've *seen* her?"

"I've talked with her."

The heavy man's hand was behind him. Ollie could have sworn that he heard it surreptitiously withdrawing the bolt.

"Well, what does she say?"

"Nothing. She's naturally in a ve'y nervous condition. She wants to see you."

There came from the shadow where Cal stood a long-drawn sigh—a sigh as of startled relief.

"What about?" he asked.

"How do I know?" Ollie's voice grew a trifle peevish. "You ought to understand better than I do what she wants to see you about. Why do you stop here asking fool questions? If you haven't been drinking, wash up and go over there. She said she'd be waiting in that ground-floor room with the bow-window in it. She said for you to come right up."

Cal strengthened a little and stepped forward into the light. He dragged another chair after him and sat down, slowly, at the table. Witherspoon saw

his face again, and did not like what he saw. All gods require sacrifices, but the god of self requires more than its favors are worth, and Ollie noted in Cal's face the marks that were left by what this worshiper had surrendered. The man had indeed not been drinking, but he was the picture of one that has cast off all the shackles of the social sense. Absolute irresponsibility is, after all, absolute freedom, and the only absolute freedom at present possible to man; but Cal showed the price that had been paid for his liberty—the saddest lesson of morality: that penance is one thing and amendment quite another.

"I don't know that I'll go," he said; "I don't know that I ought to go."

"If you'll just get yourself into fit shape——" began Witherspoon.

"'Tain't that. You saw for yourself I hadn't been drinking." Cal's eyes narrowed to a cunning stare. "I don't know as it would be good for her to see me just yet."

"I think," said Witherspoon, trying to disguise his real sentiments, "that you had better go."

Cal leaned across the table and peered into Ollie's set face.

"What's your interest in this?" he asked.

"Merely Flor'da. I tell you she sent me."

"Look here: did you come alone?"

Was the man mad from grief? "Of course I came alone. What you driving at?"

"Did you——" Cal seemed to change the subject. "Did you know they lynched that nigger?"

But, fair as Ollie wanted to be, he did not see why he should surrender any advantage that might come to his case in its trial before Florida, if he allowed her to break to Cal the news that she was aware of the lynching and of Cal's part in it.

"Yes," he nodded; "I knew that."

"It was your fault," said Cal.

Witherspoon flushed.

"You're crazy," he said. "I had no hand in it."

"No, but you made me tell those fellows about Billy Turner being around. I think you as good as hanged him yourself."

"Made you tell them? You didn't have to tell if you didn't want to!"

"Didn't I? How—— What are folks saying?"

"I don't know. I haven't heard. I don't care. Now, are you going to see Flor'da, or are you not?"

"I don't see why you're so interested."

"I told you why: I'm interested because Flor'da wants it."

Cal's face clouded.

"Let's drop this," he said. "We're both thinking of one thing and talking about another—a mole's conversation: all below ground. You were in love with her, weren't you?"

Ollie saw that, if he was to keep his promise to Florida, he must be suave with this overwrought

creature, and he was as suave as Erasmus.

"As much as you were," he answered.

It was, however, the most insulting sort of patronage; the sort that expresses itself unconsciously. Cal's mouth curled.

"I'm in love with her *now*," he said. "Come, tell the truth and shame the devil: are you?"

His tone was hard to bear, but Ollie, holding fast to the memory of his commission, gritted his teeth and, of all the words that he wanted to say, said only:

"I am."

Cal's sneer hardened.

"Well," he said, "there's nothing quite so ludicrous as a homely man in love. So you're running her errands, are you? Good; in love, the more you give the less you get."

Witherspoon's imperturbability fell, and shattered like a dropped mirror.

"You cowardly hound!" he said. "I'm giving you something that you haven't got the courage to take: I'm giving you a fair chance. She wants to see you to find out whether you still love her; but I've been there first, and you're afraid of the comparison."

By his anger he had wrought what by his diplomacy he had failed to accomplish. Cal sprang to his feet, oversetting his chair. His cursing was so comprehensive that it was almost ecclesiastical, but it was, also ecclesiastically, almost exultant. Witherspoon realized that he had betrayed his own fear—

the very fear that he had denied—the fear that Florida preferred this lover. And Cal, it seemed, found in this disclosure some deeper satisfaction or relief than Ollie was conscious of having conveyed.

“I’ll show you,” concluded Ridgeley; “I’ll show you right soon! I’ll take your fair chance. She only said to you that she wanted to see me? Ve’y well, I know what that means; it means that she loves me—it means that she’s got to marry me!”

He flung open the back-shutters, letting a flood of afternoon sunlight pour into the foul room. He called to the landlord to fetch him a basin and towel, and, all the while muttering lively profanity, he set about making a toilet. In a half hour he stood up—at least in appearance, partly rehabilitated.

He walked out to the road, Witherspoon following. The sunlight showed the sinister lines on his face more strongly than the lamp had shown them; but Cal strode upright now, with an air that somehow struck Ollie as savoring of bravado.

At the door, Witherspoon saw Teddy and called to him. The dog started forward, then raised his nose, the nostrils dilated, and set great, frightened eyes on Cal. Instantly he stopped. The hair rose on his back, his tail dropped between his legs, and he began to back, his regard fixed upon Ridgeley, as if the animal, wild to retreat, too much feared Cal to turn his eyes away. Cal saw this and started.

“Come here!” he said roughly. He put out his



hand, but the dog uttered a loud yelp and bolted.

"That's queer," said Ollie: "I thought that pup was just in love with you, Cal."

Ridgeley turned upon the speaker viciously.

"You shet your damn' mouth!" he said.

He squared his shoulders, swung around the house and started up the road in the direction of "The Palmettos," where Florida was waiting.

Ollie stood at the corner of the tavern, watching the retreating figure. He looked at it for a long time; then he called to the dog.

Teddy came joyfully enough now, ears erect, tail wig-wagging rapid signals of pleasure. He put his forepaws upon Witherspoon's knee, as Witherspoon bent to pat him, and he licked the hand that stroked his still somewhat battered head.

"It is queer," Ollie repeated.

Why had the dog, for long a friend of Cal, suddenly become an enemy? Hadn't somebody said that the dog had been with Florida last night?

Questions began suddenly to rush upon Witherspoon like water into a lock when the canal-hands have opened the gates. Why had Cal hidden in the tavern? The man had fastened himself there; he had asked if Ollie was alone; he had been sitting at a table so close to the light that it was plain he feared the darkness, and yet he had fled there from the daylight outside. If he were merely in a fit of dejection from knowledge of the events of the



early part of the preceding evening, why had he turned from the liquor that was his habitual refuge? Why had he become so suddenly sensitive to blood-letting and why so anxious to shift the blame of Billy Turner's death to Witherspoon's shoulders?

Ollie remembered the muddy boots and corduroys and wondered why Cal should have been tramping the roads through the last night's thunder storm. If that was mental agony over the thing that had befallen Florida, why had Cal not been to the house to ask about her, and why had he so hesitated when he asked Ollie concerning her condition? A natural delicacy, perhaps; but had the rest of Cal's conduct displayed delicacy of any kind? Why, when Ollie had said that he had been talking with Florida, did Ridgeley start and quietly unbolt the door?

Cal's courage had returned at last, but it had returned only when Witherspoon admitted that Florida had not taken her messenger into her full confidence. If Cal had been so sure of her love, why did he quibble about going to see her? If his objections had not been quibbles, why had he dropped them the moment that Ollie had said—What?

Witherspoon looked up the road whereon Cal had now passed altogether from his sight.

"My God," he gasped; "I wonder——"

He had promised Florida to see that Ridgeley got to "The Palmettos." It struck him that he had better saunter back there, however slowly.

## CHAPTER XV

THE PRISONER AT THE BAR

"The contaminating effect of deeds often lies less in the commission than in the consequent adjustment of our desires."

—GEORGE ELIOT: "Romola."

## XV

MEANWHILE, at "The Palmettos," the moment that Witherspoon had left her, Florida sought her father. Without disturbing her mother, she summoned him from the bedside of his wife.

He closed gently behind him the door of her room.

"Florida," he said, "you ought not to be up. What's the matter. Are you——"

Her interruption was quiet, but assured.

"Father," she explained, her voice so lowered that it could not pierce the door and reach her mother's ears, "there is one matter that must be settled before I can go away. I've been thinking about it all day, and I've decided that it must be settled at once—and by me."

The Colonel nodded his weary silver head.

"It is this," Florida went on: "More than a week ago, Cal Ridgeley asked me to marry him——"

"Flor'da! Your cousin Cal? Without speaking first to your father? Think what he has shown himself: he shot Jackson! Why didn't you tell me?"

"I waited. I wasn't sure. No matter. Now—now that all this has happened, of course——. Well, I must release him, and I must do it myself."

The Colonel drew back in astonishment. He tried to recapture his ancient poise, but he was very weary and very aged.

"Daughter——" The old man's lip trembled. "I don't know—I don't know what to advise. It seems to me not right that you——" He put a trembling hand before his face; he left the sentence unfinished. "Your father seems to have got very old all of a sudden, and I don't——"

She put her arms about his neck.

"There's no need of advice, Daddy. I know what to do, and I shan't do it—I can't do it—by letter. I must see him——"

"See him? You wouldn't——"

"Yes, I must see him. I must see him alone. I must see him now. I want to get it all over and done for. I have sent for him. I shall be down stairs with him. It won't take more than fifteen minutes when he comes, and all I want you to promise is that you'll stay up here with Mother for that length of time."

The Colonel commanded her to see nobody, but he commanded in vain. He pleaded, but his pleading counted nothing. His consternation that she should think, in the circumstances, of talking to a man that had made her an offer of marriage, and

his horror that she should put such thoughts into action, were both lost upon her. He had a new daughter. The girl had become a woman; the malleable metal had been hardened in the furnace of reality; she would not yield; and, because she would not yield, the Colonel, feeling that the foundations of his whole social order had crumbled into dust beneath him, was himself forced at last to surrender: to give the promise demanded of him and to return to his wife.

And so Florida, having taken in her own bare hands the double-edged blade of Justice, waited for Cal in the old colonial room among the portraits of those men and women whose daughter he had outraged. She drew the window tight and fastened it. She even braved the awed curiosity of a servant and, saying that she expected Ridgeley, directed that, when he came, he should be shown in to her and any later caller denied. Then, before the spindle-legged Chippendale table, she sat down to wait on one of the stiff-backed chairs.

Outside the Easter stillness was unbroken. Through the closed window she could see the breathless palmettos, the bending live-oaks, green in the Sunday sun. A crimson-rambler flowered against the panes, and beyond it she caught the color of the roses. The road—even the wall between the garden and the road—was invisible.

She waited long, but she waited quietly. She, too,

had won her battle: she was a fearless woman now not only because she had, she felt, suffered the worst that could happen, but also because, through all her conscious moments of the past night, she had faced that worst and her own share in it. Her temperament was of the sort that, once her determination had been taken, could abide in patience, and when at last she heard the clang of the distant gate, followed by the crunching sound of heavy footsteps on the walk, her hands, folded in her lap, did not tremble.

The door opened, and turbaned Eliza entered.

"Mars' Cal," she announced.

Florida bowed in silence. The servant admitted Ridgeley and closed the door behind him, leaving the pair face to face, alone.

He stood there looking at her and yet afraid to meet her candid brown eyes. The mud had been scraped from his boots and corduroys, but both still showed its stains. His long black hair fell from his thin face and left it cleaned, but yellow. Under the flowing black mustache, the full red lips worked nervously. His eagle nose breathed hard; both big hands gripped at his soft felt hat, held before him.

Florida did not rise. Her pale cheeks showed her physical weakness, and her tight lips betrayed her nervous suffering; but her voice, when she finally spoke, was her old-time calm contralto.

"Where's your revolver?" she asked.

Cal started. His red eyes met hers, hesitated, fell.

"I dunno," he said.

"Where's your revolver?" repeated Florida, precisely as if she had not said the words before.

Cal's right hand brushed back his Norfolk jacket and sought a hip-pocket. It went there slowly, as if it did not know the way; but it went, and when it appeared again, it held, dangling loosely, unfamiliarly, the Colt revolver that had been Cal's father's and that had given Jim Jackson his death-wound.

Florida nodded toward the desk.

"Put it over there," she said.

Cal looked at her again, and again looked quickly away.

"No," he muttered, and she saw his teeth as he said it.

But Florida did not retreat.

"You must realize," she said, "that there is a good deal we must say to each other. You must have wanted to say your part of it, or you wouldn't have come. Ve'y well. I won't talk to you unless you first do what I want you to do. Put that revolver in the desk where it belongs."

Then, almost like a man walking in his sleep, he obeyed her. With clumsy fingers that fumbled at the catch, he opened the desk. He picked up the wooden case, raised its cover as if he were afraid to



look at what it contained, dropped the revolver inside and restored the case to the desk.

"Now," said Florida, "come back here."

He walked to the spot she indicated—a spot that left her sitting between him and the desk—and stood there.

A palpitating silence followed.

"Flor'da," he at last began, "Flor'da——"

He reached out both his hands to her, his head still lowered, his soft hat falling disregarded to the floor.

She drew back in her chair.

"Don't so much as put your fingers on me!" she commanded.

His eyes met hers once more—his wild, hunted, ashamed—hers, steady, calm, unwavering. The woman had indeed found herself; different as these two had always been, the gulf that had always yawned between them seemed never so wide, never so hopeless of bridging, as it seemed now.

"Where's Billy Turner?" asked Florida.

Cal started. His hands were jerked back to his sides; they clenched until their rough nails pierced the calloused palms. His head shot erect, then drooped again, his red mouth still working, but unable to form a reply.

"Where's Billy Turner?" asked Florida.

"Flor'da!" The word leaped out, but none followed. The lips remained open, but empty.

"Answer me," the girl ordered. "What has become of my daid brother's servant?"

He had to speak then.

"Flor'da, don't think the things you're thinking now! I'm not *all* that you think I am—I am not, Flor'da. Wait till I tell you. Wait till I tell you how it happened about Billy Turner. I'll tell you, but I've got to tell you first about—about you and me."

"Don't!" she cried.

"I've got to. I didn't plan it. It just come over me. First I wanted to make you marry me, and then, sudden-like——"

"Don't!" she again ordered. "Tell me just one thing: tell me what has become of Billy Turner—of my daid brother's servant?"

He turned to that. The words seemed to burn his throat; they seemed to tear at his tongue; but they came:

"It wasn't my fault. When I tell you, you'll see it wasn't all my fault. I want you to understand it just as it happened. Then you'll know that now everything's gone from me—*everything*. I'm nothing—nothing any more but just alive!"

She looked at him.

"That," said Florida, "is the one thing you should not be."

He did not heed this. He stood before her like a man in the dock, of whom the judge has asked

the formal question whether there is any reason why sentence should not be pronounced upon him.

"Flor'da," he stammered, "it would 'a' been better if I'd done only this and not the other, but this I *didn't* do!"

She saw him as he was—she, the worshiper of courage—saw him, the brute and the coward.

"You stood by—you, a man, or the pretense of a man—you stood by an' let this be done!"

"I did not! Leastways, Flor'da——"

"You gave the evidence—if you can call it evidence. You told them he'd been near by—though how you knew that, unless he was the man you said you were to meet, I don't know. You accused him—yes, you did! You hinted at him; you wove the web about his feet—and you did it *because you were afraid!*"

"Flor'da, will you listen to me?"

"Not yet. What can you say? What is there *for* you to say? I know, you see—I know. You gave the evidence. What difference does it make who drew the rope? You're the real hangman. You're the false witness."

"Flor'da, what was I to do?"

"Do?" Her eyes widened in scorn of him. "Do? Can you ask me that?"

"It was my life or a nigger's."

"What is your life worth?"

"Nothing—I know. But when a man's life's in

danger, it *seems* worth more to him than anything else in the world. I didn't lie. I only told them the truth to the questions they asked—and then all I could do was to stand aside and pray.”

And this was the strong man, this giant was the brave man, whose power had once so mightily drawn her to him! In that crisis he had prayed—not, of course, for the courage to die, but for the success of his deception! In a flash it was revealed to her. It was not as if she was seated in that room in her father's house. It was at first as if she were at the gate, in the darkness when Witherspoon put his question to Cal, and when Cal, with the ominous crowd gathered around him, made his fatal reply. This first, and then it was as if she were standing in that alley where Cal had hidden when the noose was placed about Billy Turner's neck; as if she were facing Cal when the bolt of lightning smashed the crumbling castles of cloud and lighted the place where he crouched; as if, by the gleam of that lightning, she saw into his frightened brain.

“I know now,” she said, “why, at last, you ran away from Beaufain's Pond. It wasn't because you were sorry at having done wrong; it was because you were afraid of meeting Billy; or I screamed, and you were afraid some one else would hear—but you were afraid, in any case—afraid—afraid—afraid!”

She had risen and advanced toward him, support-

ing herself by her slim white hand upon the back of an old armchair, decorated with a smiling shepherdess worked on a sampler a hundred years ago. Looking at her with staring eyes, shrinking from her as all cowards shrink from the truth, it must have seemed to him that her voice rose to a clear shout of denunciation audible to the whole world. In reality her tone was level and unchanged, although the gaze that regarded only his crime-lined exterior was catching, also, wide glimpses of the vast, still uncharted regions of the human soul.

"I am no harder on you," she said, "than I mean to be on myself. I helped. I didn't know it, but I helped. What you were going toward you knew; what you were going toward I didn't know, and yet, even though you were bound to get there alone, I did help to draw you on. I can look back now and see the growth of them in me: those lil' yieldings that prepare us for the great temptation."

He misunderstood her, of course. His roving eyes stopped. Faintly, something like hope shone in them, and something that is baser than hope.

"Flor'da," he said, "I don't want for you to think altogether so hard of me. I told you last night that I wanted to marry you. Well, I want to marry you now."

She could laugh. To her amazement, she found that, even in the midst of these horrors, in the face of this craven turpitude, in the face of her own shat-

tered ideals, and of the man she might have loved, she could laugh.

"Marry me?" she said. "Oh, no; you don't want to marry me. Yesterday, perhaps; but to-day, no. What you want is to save yourself—that's all."

"It ain't, Flor'da! You're wrong!"

"Am I? Well, it doesn't matter." If he was like the criminal in the dock, she was like the judge pronouncing sentence. She had yet her heaviest words to say, but this thing must be said at once. "You offer to make me—what is it that they call it?—'a respectable woman.' I don't want respectability at that price, Cal—I don't want it if the only way to get it is to take *you*."

His hands worked convulsively.

"I do love you," he said.

"Don't—" she commanded—"don't tell me you love me. I know your mind—now. You're the sort that don't love—afterward. Yes, you are the sort that don't love at all, because you don't know what love is."

"Flor'da!" That a woman in her position could refuse what he considered her sole chance of rehabilitation—that was beyond him.

"No, don't try to talk to me any more. I thought at first you might just possibly have something to say—something real. But I know you can't have. I won't let you talk to me while you try to talk so."

Wonder had claimed him at her refusal of his

offer; now terror seized him at her persistence in negation.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"I want you to clean your hands of blood before you ask me to listen to you. I thought perhaps you had really suffered—suffered for something beside yourself. I said to myself that the littlest sorrow brings us nearer to Heaven than the greatest joy, and I thought perhaps you'd got from Heaven the mercy of some suffering that'd give you the courage you were born without."

"Flor'da"—his small soul could seize upon only the arrow that wounded his vanity—"I ain't a coward—not the way you think me, I ain't. What have I got to do?"

She was still standing. She looked at him steadily. The time had come for her final word; the full sentence was to be pronounced at last—the sentence to the carrying-out of which she would sacrifice not only herself, but her father and mother, too: further scandal would mean wider publicity; but Florida had made up her mind.

"You've got to clear that daid boy's memory," she said.

"What!" cried Cal.

"I don't care whether you want to do it or not; you've got to do it, Cal."

"Clear his memory?" Nothing was so far remote from Ridgeley's experience, from his whole



range of conjecture. He could not at first understand her. "What do you mean? What's his memory worth, anyway?"

"More than you are, Cal."

"But, Flor'da—I'm sorry about him; God only knows——"

"Don't speak of God, Cal."

"Nobody knows but me, then, how bad I feel; but you don't understand what you're talking about, Flor'da, when you talk about clearing the memory of a nigger."

"It seems to me that I know better than you do."

"And you want me to——"

"I want you to take back your lies. I want you to tell the truth. I order you to do it. This boy was lynched because you let him be lynched. He was lynched for something that you did. What you've got to do is to tell the truth—the whole truth—to your own disadvantage just as publicly as you told that one false part of the truth and hanged Billy Turner!"

"You're crazy!" he said.

"You've got to do what I say," she calmly answered.

"Don't you know what that would mean to me, Flor'da?"

"I don't care what it would mean to you."

"Then think of your pa and ma." She must be mad!



"I have thought of everything. You talk of what it would mean; this much I'll make it mean: I don't believe you want to marry me, and I know I'd rather go down into Hell than be your wife, Cal Ridgeley; but"—yes, she would offer him, if he really wanted it, this bribe—"but if you'll do this, and you really do want to marry me, you can have me."

She *was* crazy; he was sure of it now.

"Have you?" His mouth twisted into an ugly grin. "There'd be lil' of me left to get you! You wouldn't have to keep your promise, so it's easy enough for you to make it. If I did what you ask me to do, it would mean death for me."

His grin stopped at the unpleasant word, but Florida, with a touch of color creeping into her cheeks, made instant answer.

"Then," she said, "take death and be glad of the chance!"

Very slowly he began to see just how much in earnest she was. Her reason, her point of view, was, and must always be, beyond him; but her conclusion there was no longer any mistaking. She actually intended that he should do this thing! His bushy brows drew together.

"And if I don't do it?" he asked.

"Never mind that," she replied; "if you're afraid of your death—well, I told you I wouldn't be harder on you than I would be on myself: do you think

it will be any easier for me to have the truth known than it will be for you to tell it?"

Cal tossed back his head. His old self returned; it mastered him, and he welcomed it.

"You're talking nonsense," he said, and his eyes shone evilly. "You can't order me around, and you know it. It's time to stop this play-acting. I'm not afraid of you."

"Not afraid of a woman?" Her lip curled. "You are brave, after all, aren't you? But there's a difference between being brave and merely believing your enemy's a coward. I reckon the time's come for me to show you that you've not judged me right."

She started toward the door, but he stood between that and her, and, as she advanced, he spread out his arms to bar the way.

"Stop!" he said.

"Let me by," said Florida.

He shook his head.

"Where you going?" he asked.

"Cal"—she gave him one more chance—"you won't do what I tell you to?"

"I certainly will not."

There was a moment's pause.

"Then," said Florida, "I am going to do it for you!"

Instantly Cal leaped backward. He leaned against the door, turned the big rusted key that

protruded from the lock on the inside and thrust the key into his coat-pocket. He was a wild beast at bay; he was a coward in a corner.

"Now," he snarled, as he faced her, once more breathing hard, "if you don't change your mind, I'll kill you!"

She stopped short. Then she smiled and, as she spoke, fell back slowly, a step at a time.

"No, you won't," she said. "I'm not afraid of death—now. But *you* would be afraid to kill me. This time you couldn't blame it on a nigger!"

That taunt lashed him to the last paroxysm.

"Won't I kill you?" he began, advancing toward her, his arms half extended with their long talons curved to clutch. "Won't I? Your way would be death for me anyhow. Do you think, then, that I won't choose a way of my own?"

Slowly he advanced and slowly she—her eyes fixed on his as the eyes of a trainer are fixed on those of the wild beast that has rebelled—retreated.

"Will you change your mind?" he asked.

He was leaning far forward. His chin was thrust out; his red lips again showed his teeth.

Florida, still retreating, put her hands behind her back.

"What time is it?" she asked.

The casual, commonplace question, seizing him unaware at this instant of crisis, almost produced the commonplace result. His hand sought his watch.



*Albert Metzke*

"NOW," SAID FLORIDA, CALMLY, "I'LL GIVE YOU FIFTEEN MINUTES TO RECONSIDER YOUR DECISION"



For just the flutter of an eyelid his attention was diverted.

With one movement, Florida leaped backward, shoved the light Chippendale table between them, flung open the desk and seized the pistol-case. Cal sprang for her, but the table was in the way, and before he had circled it, she had laid hold of the revolver, tossed the case with its other burdens through a pane of the window, and stood with the blue barrel of the Colt leveled at his head.

"Now," said Florida, calmly, "I'll give you fifteen minutes to reconsider your decision. You tell or I do: which?"



## CHAPTER XVI

### EASTER SUNLIGHT



O world, be nobler, for her sake!  
If she but knew thee what thou art,  
What wrongs are borne, what deeds are done  
In thee, beneath thy daily sun,  
Know'st thou not that her tender heart  
For pain and very shame would break?  
O world, be nobler, for her sake!

—LAURENCE BINYON.

## XVI

WHEN he had parted from Witherspoon, Sanborn, on his way to inquire for Jane, went forward with all his doubts unresolved. He was determined to save, so far as he might, the woman he loved from a situation that promised soon to become too much for all concerned in it; beyond that he could not, even in resolution, proceed.

Jane herself answered his summons to the door of her house. Her face was wet with tears.

"Come in," she said, and as, having bent and kissed her, he hesitated on the threshold; "I couldn't bear the porch to-day. I want to hide myself—I want to hide even from the light."

She led him into the drawing-room. At all other times, its striking characteristic lay in its points of difference from the other drawing-rooms of that countryside. Now, however, its difference was obscured; the curtains were drawn against the glad Easter light: it was as if there were some one dead in the house.

"What is the news from 'The Palmettos'?" he asked.

Jane spoke slowly.

"Florida is better. Cousin Caroline is ill. I must go back there. Just now I have been trying to comfort Sally."

"Sally?" He did not understand.

"My maid," Jane explained. "You know, she was the sweetheart of that—of Billy Turner. Of course she swears he didn't do it, poor girl."

"I couldn't have believed it of him," said Sanborn.

"Nor I. But you don't understand these people, Mark. I've been away so much that I don't understand them. It's only natural for Sally to say—she says he couldn't have come to her for money to get away, as they declared he did, because they found some in his clothes after—after—— But, O Mark, he *was* here for *some* reason or other—she admits Ollie saw him here, in this house, last night!"

She put her head on his shoulder. He tried to soothe her, but his mind was whirling from the shock of her last words.

"He had money? You say he had money?"

She made, against his shoulder, an affirmative movement of her head.

"How much?"

"I don't remember. Fifty dollars, I think. What does it matter how much it was? I know it was a lot for him."

"You're sure of this?"

"I'm sure they say so. Sally won't tell me anything except that he didn't do it. They said he robbed Florida, but I know she'd never carry so much about with her."

For a moment, Sanborn made no answer. Cal Ridgeley had said he was to meet a man at Beau-fain's Pond. Billy was to bring him the money there. That money, presumably, was to be paid by Ridgeley to Witherspoon. But Witherspoon had no appointment with Cal—had not been to Beau-fain's Pond until summoned there, with Sanborn, by Florida's cry. Until now, Mark had been too stunned by the tragedy to reason about it; he had accepted—even he—the current point of view. Now, however, a hundred questions—a hundred horrible questions—leaped, fully formed, into his mind. The fact that Turner still had the money at the time of his death: did that add to the evidence of his guilt or take from it? If guilty, would he have stopped merely to bid Sally good-by? Florida had gone to the pond; Cal had started there before her. Was it coincidence that they both should go, at that strange time, to that lonely place? Had not Billy arrived the last of the three? If——

But Jane's arms were tightening around his neck.

"O, Mark, Mark!" she cried. "I can't stand it here, after all these horrors. Florida's turned against me at last—I suppose just because of what

Cal did to Jim Jackson. Just because of that *I've* wanted to get away from Cal. And now this new thing—this last thing—for it to have happened to Florida, of all people in the world! Take me away from it all! I want to get away from everybody but you."

In answer to that appeal, he put, for the time, everything else aside. Resolutely, he shut the door on all his new-born doubts—even on all the vexed questions as to what his ultimate course of duty must be in regard to her brother. He would take her away; he would take her away at once.

They sat in the darkened parlor and laid their plans. His work here was all but finished. He stood so well with his employers that, by telegraphing them, he could, and would, receive an immediate transfer. The time raced by unheeded.

At last she rose from the seat to which he had led her.

"I shall go to 'The Palmettos' now," she said, "and bid them good-by. It will be like *doing* something instead of only talking. I don't want to intrude my happiness on their grief, but I mustn't leave without a word to them. And then—" her cheeks were red, and she was smiling—"and then to-morrow——"

He kissed her.

"To-morrow," he said, "we go away together."

"I'll try to find Cal this afternoon and tell him.

Perhaps, Mark, this thing that has happened to Florida will soften Cal."

Sanborn looked away.

"I'll walk as far as 'The Palmettos' with you," said he.

He took her out into the sunshine on the porch—out of the funereal shadows and into the light and warmth of Easter Day. He took her hands and looked into her eyes.

"Remember," he said, "whatever happens, you're to come with me to-morrow."

"Whatever happens?" There flashed a quick fear into her eyes, but it was conquered by her love, as all fear and all sorrow would thenceforth be conquered. "What can happen now?"

"Who knows," asked Sanborn gravely—"after what *has*? You must promise me, Jane."

Her eyes were steady upon his.

"I promise," she said.

"And whatever happens *then*," said Mark, "we two can surely bear."



## CHAPTER XVII

GUILTY!



“So dear to heaven is saintly chastity  
That when a soul is found sincerely so,  
A thousand liveried angels lackey her.”

—MILTON: “Comus.”

## XVII

IF a man in power is more than a man, then a man thrust from power is less. Over at "The Palmettos," Cal Ridgeley, facing Florida and realizing that she meant her threat—Ridgeley, drawing away from that steadily leveled barrel of blue steel—drawing away in a recoil that stripped him of his last mask of vanity and pretense—revealed himself to Florida, if further revelation were necessary, as he had never before revealed himself to any intelligence, and least of all to his own.

"You—you wouldn't use it!" he gasped.

"Wouldn't *you*?" asked Florida. "I tell you, I'm quite in earnest. You have fifteen minutes. Sit down. Not there. Across the table, facing the window. So. Put your watch here in front of me, open."

He feared death too much to argue further with her intention. He retreated around the table, slinking backward. He put out his hand, groped for a chair, found it, drew it up and sank upon it. He pulled out his watch and put it on the table. But all the while he never took his horrified eyes

from the blue barrel that followed—followed like the rattler poised to strike—his every movement.

She sat down opposite and looked at him. Once she lowered her calm eyes to the face of the watch. Cal lurched forward, but the eyes were instantly meeting his own once more along the barrel of the revolver.

"Flor'da," he whined, "I did it because I loved you!"

"You killed Billy Turner because you loved me?"

"Not that. I don't mean that, Flor'da. You—I—you know what I mean."

"I don't believe you," said Florida.

"It's God's truth," he protested. "You said you wouldn't marry me, and I wanted to make you marry me."

"Oh, well," she sighed, "perhaps you did. I don't care why you did it, Cal. I'm not at all thinking about what you did to me; I'm thinking only about what you did to Billy Turner—and to yourself."

"What I did to Billy Turner? To a nigger?"

"Yes, Cal; to a nigger—to a human being. Just because we don't invite them to dinner, doesn't mean we consider that niggers have no right to their own lives."

"If I did what you want, it would be sure death for me," said Ridgeley. "What for do you want me to die?"

"It don't matter to me, Cal, whether you die or live. It only matters that you tell the truth at last."

The giant stared across the small circle of the table-top. His mouth was working, his eyes narrowed in an ugly manner. He looked like a rat driven into a closet and turning to fight only under the goad of the ultimate fear.

"Well," he said, "suppose I let *you* tell it? Do you think anybody'll believe I was the only one of us to blame?"

"Probably not," said Florida. "Certainly not," she added, "if they listen to all that I'll tell them, because I'll tell them the whole truth."

"And suppose *I* tell them the whole truth?"

"That is just what I want for you to do."

But he knew what the end would be, and he saw that she had no fear in her.

"Flor'da," he pleaded, "don't be so hard on me. The nigger's daid. I can't bring him back to life, can I?"

"You can do justice, Cal; and you shall do it."

"No!" His voice dropped to the whine that he tried to make a note of pleading. "Flor'da, listen to me: let's go away together, you and I—just you and I. Let's go far away where nobody'll know us. I'll start all over there. I can't do any good by telling things here; and if we run away, people'll surmise, and that'll be the same as if I told." He

became eager, wheedling. "I'll write a letter about it, if you want me to, and then, when we're away, I'll be a different man—indeed I will, Flor'da."

"Cal, can you expect me to believe your promises? Even if I thought you'd keep them, you forget that I don't want to marry you. Hurry; you have only ten minutes more."

Her words hurt him, but what hurt more was the sense of his own futility and the steady advance of the thing he so abjectly feared. With babbling tongue, with a forehead damp from sweat, he begged her to relent. He knew what penalty he must pay if ever that countryside learned of what he had done, and so he knew that he was begging for his life. Now not so much like the rat in the closet as like a frightened fox released in a fastened room, he darted, mentally, from side to side to escape the pursuing hound of his fate, only to find all exits blocked to him. When he flung out his arms in appeal, she commanded him to put them down. When he pleaded, promised, threatened, she only shook her resolute head. And all the while the revolver followed him, changed now from hand to hand, but never wavering in its aim.

And for Florida, all the while, the great miracle of the soul was being wrought. Every depth that he uncovered in himself revealed to her a height in another. Every token of his cowardice was a standard by which to judge another's bravery.

Every coarse grain that he bared for her in his own heart served but to remind her of the fineness of the man that she now, at last, knew she loved.

In the beginning, Cal Ridgeley's fear blinded him; but, as it rose, as the wild tide of it mounted, it raised him to a sort of clairvoyance. Just at the desperate end of his struggles to elude her, he felt—he knew—that she had already eluded him.

"There's somebody else!" he cried. "I know now why you don't care about me. I know now why you won't listen to me. There's somebody else!"

"Yes," admitted Florida serenely, "there is."

"Well," the giant retorted, "whatever happens, you'll never get him! Are you such a fool as to think that you can? Are you such a fool as to think any one'd have you now? Answer me that! You've got to take me: there's the plain fact. Who'll marry you if I won't?"

He was leaning far over the table now, his eyes burning into hers. He had not forgotten what his rival told him in the tavern: he remembered the true nature of Florida's situation, and he was beginning to calculate upon what that truth would mean were it revealed to Ollie.

Florida drew back, but only far enough to keep the poised revolver out of his reach.

"The man I love," she answered.

"Likely, ain't it?" sneered Cal between his yellow teeth. "Who'd you reckon'll have you—in all this neighborhood?"

Neither her voice nor her eyes wavered.

"The man that loves me," said Florida.

"Who?" demanded Cal.

"You better think of your own case," she replied.

"You've only three minutes left."

"Who is it?" Ridgeley reiterated. "You can't tell me! You're bluffing me—trying to bluff me. If there was one such man you'd name him mighty quick, and you know you would."

"I could name him if I chose," said Florida: "I don't choose."

Cal's lips tightened.

"It's Ollie Witherspoon," he said.

Carelessly she nodded.

In Cal's face came a change—hot and quick—which drove out the cold thing that it found there. The strong man can be angry, but only the weak can hate, and Cal's hatred suddenly lay upon him like a malignant disease. Florida, watching him, recalled the Bible-stories of persons, for their sins, stricken, in an instant, with leprosy. She saw his pallor vanish; she saw red blotches appear upon his cheeks—and she knew what it meant; it meant that this man, with his inherited curse of fear and hate, had come again into the other portion of his heritage; that the former had been conquered by the latter: that

hatred had overcome fear. The human brain has choice of but two secure armors: perfect hope and perfect despair. Cal chose despair.

"I'll do it," he said.

She could not at once credit him.

"Which?" she asked.

"I'll take my chances," he answered. "I'll tell it myself."

The girl still hesitated.

But the man laughed, and his laughter was worse than had been his pleading and his threats.

"Oh, you can put by your gun," he said. "I'll keep my word this time, Flor'da. I'll tell it. I'll tell it, and then you'll see the difference that it makes in your lover to know that, even if you did resist at the last, up to the last you loved me. You'll see a few things that you haven't reckoned for—and as I've kept my promise, *so you'll have to keep yours*; if I come out of this alive from the mob, you'll have to marry me."

In spite of herself, the girl's hand faltered, but before, had he wished to, Cal could take any advantage of her weakness, there came a sharp interruption. There was a tapping at the window. Cal started, but did not take his eyes from her; Florida looked around: the man that had followed Cal from the tavern, Ollie Witherspoon, unable longer to fight with the doubts that assailed him, had returned to "The Palmettos" and was standing just outside



of the room, peering in at the broken pane. Florida's face went white.

"Look!" she whispered.

Cal turned and saw.

Momentarily, sex-training asserted itself: the woman appealed to the man.

"What shall I do?" asked Florida.

Ridgeley felt his old power returning. He laughed.

"We'll let him in," he said; "he's just the man I want most to see."

He strode, without a moment of hesitation, to the window, and flung it wide. The revolver fell from Florida's nerveless fingers to the table.

"Come in," said Cal.

Witherspoon put a hand on the sill and vaulted lightly into the room. His face had all the strength that his recent sufferings had given it, but beside Ridgeley's bulky figure he still looked young and boyish.

Florida, sitting pale and silent, shot her glance from one of them to the other. Ollie looked first at Florida and then at Cal; but Cal fixed his red eyes steadily on Witherspoon.

"Ollie," he said—and they noted that his voice had fallen into its old monotone—"we're right glad to see you. Fact is, Flor'da'd just been speaking about you. She's got something particular to say to you, Ollie—ain't you, Flor'da?"

Smiling, he turned to the girl.

Her eyes sought his in wide appeal. Here was what she had never guessed would happen. To tell the world, of which Ollie was a part—that was one thing; but to tell Ollie himself—to tell the man that she now knew she loved with all her heart—could she ever do that?

“I thought——” her cold lips began.

“No,” said Cal, “I’ve changed my mind. What’s a mind for if you can’t change it, eh, Ollie? It seems to me, Flor’da, that it would suit me better if you told this thing yourself, like you promised to do, and as I’m consenting to it and am a party to it, as you might say, it won’t change the conditions—it won’t change our lil’ agreement at all—not at all.”

Witherspoon, detecting he knew not what mailed fist beneath this velvet glove, turned to Florida.

The girl took a great breath. She would keep her word; she would accept her punishment. She lowered her eyes to the table where the revolver lay. Her hands were knotted in her lap.

“Ollie,” she said, with long pauses after every sentence, “I reckon I was in love with Cal—once. If I wasn’t in love with him, Ollie, I should ‘a’ been, for I knew he loved me. I ought to have known what a violent man he was, and I ought not to ‘ve encouraged him if I didn’t love him, and yet—and yet I did encourage him.”

Witherspoon was flushing hotly.

"Are you sure you want to tell me this, Flor'da?" he asked.

"Of course she's sure," answered Cal. "When you came a-knocking at the window, she was just saying——"

"I didn't ask *you*," flashed Witherspoon.

But the girl interrupted.

"Let me tell you," she said.

Ollie bowed, and Florida resumed in her hollow voice:

"I encouraged him, Ollie. I liked to think that a man so big and so seemingly strong could be attracted by me, and I tried all the harder to attract him more. I liked to feel his strength near me, and I liked to think that I could drive it just as easily as I can drive a mettlesome horse. I didn't know all this at the time, but, looking back now, I can see it's all true. I think—I'm not right sure—but I think I liked to give the horse my spurs, sometimes, so he'd try to get the bit into his teeth, and so I could subdue him again."

The thing that she was saying had overcome Ollie's scruples. He walked to the fireplace and leaned against the mantel.

"Well?" he said.

"Well," resumed Florida—or what had once been Florida—"on the night that he killed Jim Jackson—just before he killed him—Cal asked me to marry

him. When he asked that—when it came to something definite and final—I wasn't sure whether or no I cared enough about him to—to take him, and I asked him to wait—to give me a week to—think it over."

She paused again, and Cal moved to the chair that he had formerly occupied and sat down in it.

"Go on," he said.

"That night," she continued, without a glance at Ridgeley, "you remember how he broke out of this room and how he killed Jim. When I learned of the killing, I knew I could never marry Cal; I knew I loathed him. But he didn't come to the house for his answer, and so, last night, when he sent a note for me to meet him, I said to myself I must keep my promise, and I went out to do it—to give him his refusal by word of mouth."

She stopped again, and this time let her eyes once more seek Ridgeley's; but Ridgeley shook his head:

"Go on."

Wetting her dry lips, she continued:

"I met him. I didn't mean to accept him. I think that up to the very last I meant to refuse him. And yet—I can't explain it; perhaps because I feel so different now—and yet I must have felt, for a minute, the old way toward him then. I felt him drawing me and drawing me. And then—and then——"

Dry-eyed, but panting like one that carries a too

heavy burden, she stumbled in the midst of the sentence.

Witherspoon, with a sudden start, shook off the spell that had held him.

"I won't hear any more!" he cried. He turned hotly upon Ridgeley. "This has gone far enough!" he said.

Cal rose, advanced and raised his hand. He was smiling.

"Just a minute," he said; "just wait a minute more."

"Not a second!" vowed Witherspoon. "It's abominable. I don't know what hold you've got over her, nor what you're trying to make her confess to; but I don't care what your hold is, and I shan't believe whatever she may say. Believe it? I won't listen to it!"

The giant's raised hand descended upon Witherspoon's shoulder and captured it as if it meant to crush the bone.

"Yes, you will listen," he answered. "Yes, you will, Ollie. What she's told you's nothing but the plain truth. What happened next I'll tell you, for I reckon I'd better take my part in this. Remember what she's owned up to, Ollie. Well, what followed I did, and I did by force—but remember what preceded it."

Ollie, with a low oath, twisted under the prisoning fingers, but the prisoning fingers held him fast.

"And where was it, Flor'da?" pursued Cal.  
"Where was it?"

The woman's face was in her hands; through her fingers came the ghost of her voice:

"It was at the foot of Beaufain's Pond."

Ridgeley's hand tightened and then flung Witherspoon hurtling against the mantelpiece.

The smaller man rebounded like a rubber ball. His cheeks flamed; his fists were clenched; his eyes shone.

"It's a lie!" he gasped. "It's a damned lie!"

But Cal did not move a muscle.

"Ask her," he said.

Witherspoon cast one look at Florida, sitting with her head now fallen upon the table.

"It's a lie!" he repeated. "If it wasn't, you'd be guilty of Billy Turner's murder!"

Ridgeley shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Ask *her*," he said again.

It was, after all, his supreme moment. He had fulfilled the first of the conditions imposed upon him. If the men of that countryside could do no more than Ollie had done, he was safe; and if he was safe he could, should he choose, claim Florida.

Witherspoon stood rigid now. Her words at their last interview came back to him: "Suppose I had been attracted, against my will. Suppose . . . I had done this or that . . . to attract—him? . . . Suppose that I'd done and felt these things until

I came to understand . . . what it all meant?" But no! Witherspoon would never hesitate again. The battle was hard, but he had already won it: he had gone down into the Hell of hate and risen from the grave of temptation. His face was once more lightened. He bent toward the woman.

"Flor'da," he said, and it seemed to Cal as if Ollie had completely forgotten him—"Flor'da!"

Cal folded his arms and leaned against the nearest wall. Florida raised her face to Witherspoon; the tears were in her eyes at last.

"Do you remember, Flor'da," Witherspoon went on, "what I said to you to-day? I meant that; but now I mean more. I said that we couldn't control our desires, but could control our actions. Now I say that things done are alive only if we keep them alive by repeating them. When what you've done to yourself is repented of, it's daid. Flor'da, I don't believe you've half so much to repent of as you think you have; but, much or lil', it *is* repented of, and so you've killed it. I love you, Flor'da. Will you—will you, lil' as I deserve it, try to care enough for me to be my wife?"

A roar of rage from Cal was the only immediate answer. He stood before them, transfixed by his wrath. Just at the moment of victory, he saw the destruction of his last chance. His lips were tortured into a horrible grin; his eyes bulged from their sockets; a light foam sprinkled his mustache.



"You fool!" he gasped to Witherspoon. "Don't you understand yet—don't you know I've spoiled her for you?"

Ollie gave him glance for glance.

"I know," he said, "that nothing so low as you are has ever been able to gain her soul."

"Well, *I* know that she's promised her body to me if I want it!" cried Ridgeley, "and I know that she's got to keep her word!"

Witherspoon turned to Florida. There was a question in his eyes.

"Yes," she answered it.

"But—do you love him?"

Her shudder of repulsion was reply enough for Witherspoon. He crossed quietly to the window.

"That's it!" said Ridgeley. "Get out! We're through with you now."

"But I'm not quite through with you," Ollie quietly responded. "I know the District Attorney's your cousin, but he's a closer cousin of mine. I'm going to his house and lodge information against you for inciting the murder of Billy Turner."

Would he have done it—taken that step and followed it up with all its inevitable consequences to the innocent? He believed then that he would do it. Florida believed. And so did Ridgeley. Because Ridgeley believed, the decision was snatched out of Witherspoon's hands.

What followed, followed as if in a series of



flashes; and Florida, who saw it all with terror-stricken eyes, could never wholly forget it. Already there was a sound of footsteps in the hall, and voices, startled by the cries of Cal, were audible outside the door: the Colonel had been alarmed; from the garden, the approaching Jane and Sanborn heard and were running forward. Ridgeley, with the bellow of a maddened bull, seized the revolver from the tumbling table and charged at Witherspoon. Ollie picked up a chair and circled it above his head.

Cal leaped back, but the mastery was in his hands. He had only to shoot.

It was the lightninglike instant of decision. In it, did his usually turgid mind work with more than lightninglike rapidity? Did he realize that this rival, whom he loathed, and this girl, whom he had lost, were no Jacksons and Turners, but beings whose murder must place him on the scaffold? Did he weigh against that the effects of Ollie's threat: certainly shame—it might be, execution by mob-violence? He feared death above all other evils; but here was certain death on the one hand, possibly death and certainly disgrace on the other. Hate had, a minute since, triumphed over his dread; now another passion triumphed over it: the passion of pride—his own strange form of the pride of race.

"Ridgeleys don't hang, and they don't go to jail," he cried: "I'll settle the three of us!"

The Colonel was rattling at the door. . . .

And then, with Sanborn beside her, Jane MacDonald, the one thing that Cal had ever truly loved, appeared at the open window.

Fully she did not comprehend; but her face went white with dread.

"Call!" she called. "O, Cal!"

Sanborn started to enter.

Ridgeley's eyes, however, saw only his sister. Perhaps then he fully understood what his life had meant to her; perhaps then he understood what it would mean to her if he carried out his announced purpose, or permitted the alternative that Wither-  
spoon had threatened. Perhaps, at this last, where fear had given place to hate, and hate to pride, love—a single, final flame of his one great tenderness: his tenderness for Jane—consumed fear and hate and pride together. Perhaps it was to secure her the minimum of vicarious suffering that he resolved upon the direct and ultimate sacrifice.

"Lil' Jane!" he gasped.

His voice broke, his mouth worked, his face softened. His mad face softened into the sorrow of sanity; his maturity became, suddenly, as it were irradiated youth; the signs of dissipation, the tokens of crime and lust, fell away from it—even the marks of his heritage. The uncouth savage was, for this moment, etherealized.

It was all in that flash as of lightning. The hand

that held the revolver faltered. Witherspoon seized the opportunity and bounded forward. A woman shrieked; a man shouted.

Cal put the revolver-barrel to his own forehead, and fired.

The giant fell with a tremendous crash, and the room was filled with smoke. It was his own hand that had turned the Colt with which his father had done murder; his own finger that had now pressed the trigger of the revolver with which he had killed Jim Jackson.

Before Witherspoon could gather Florida in his arms—before Sanborn could look back toward Jane—the curse of the inheritance had done its last work: Calhoun Ridgeley was dead.

THE END

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